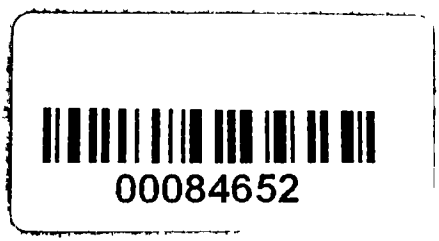

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Sport and Life in the Further Himalava



Gul Sher Khan, shikari.

Sport and Life in the Further Himalaya

BY

MAJOR R. L. KENNION

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WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

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TO

MY WIFE.

PREFACE.

DURING the noonday heats when nature is asleep, often even when "beasts" are in sight but unapproachable, the hunter of mountain big-game has time on his hands to kill somehow or other. The following sketches, originally pencil-scribbled in a note-book, are the result of some of such hours during a period of eight years' service in the regions they describe, in the course of which practically all my leisure moments were devoted to shooting in one form or another.

At the risk of my narratives appearing "bald and unconvincing," I have refrained from any attempt to embellish them by the addition of a word of fiction.

Most of these sketches have previously appeared in periodicals, and my acknowledgments are due

to the proprietors of the following publications, by whose courtesy I am permitted to reproduce them in their present form: Magazines—Bailey's, Blackwood's, Longman's, Macmillan's, Pall Mall; newspapers—Asian, Field, Pioneer.

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SPORT AND LIFE IN THE FURTHER HIMALAYA.

A DAY IN CHITRAL.

In the month of June the Chitral river is a black flood, swollen by numerous glacier torrents, tearing at a tremendous pace along the intricate way it has, in the course of ages, worn for itself among the giant ranges of the Hindu Kush. The muffled thunder of huge boulders being rolled along its rocky bed by the tempestuous flood can be heard for miles. On either hand vast masses of mountains rise up till their snowy peaks appear, at an infinite height, to meet the sky. The lower slopes, called in Eastern idiom the "skirts of the mountains," have comparatively gentle outlines, but as they rise they become steeper and more rugged till, vegetation left far below, the line of eternal snow is reached—a desolate region of ice-

fields and glaciers, stupendous precipices, and glittering peaks.

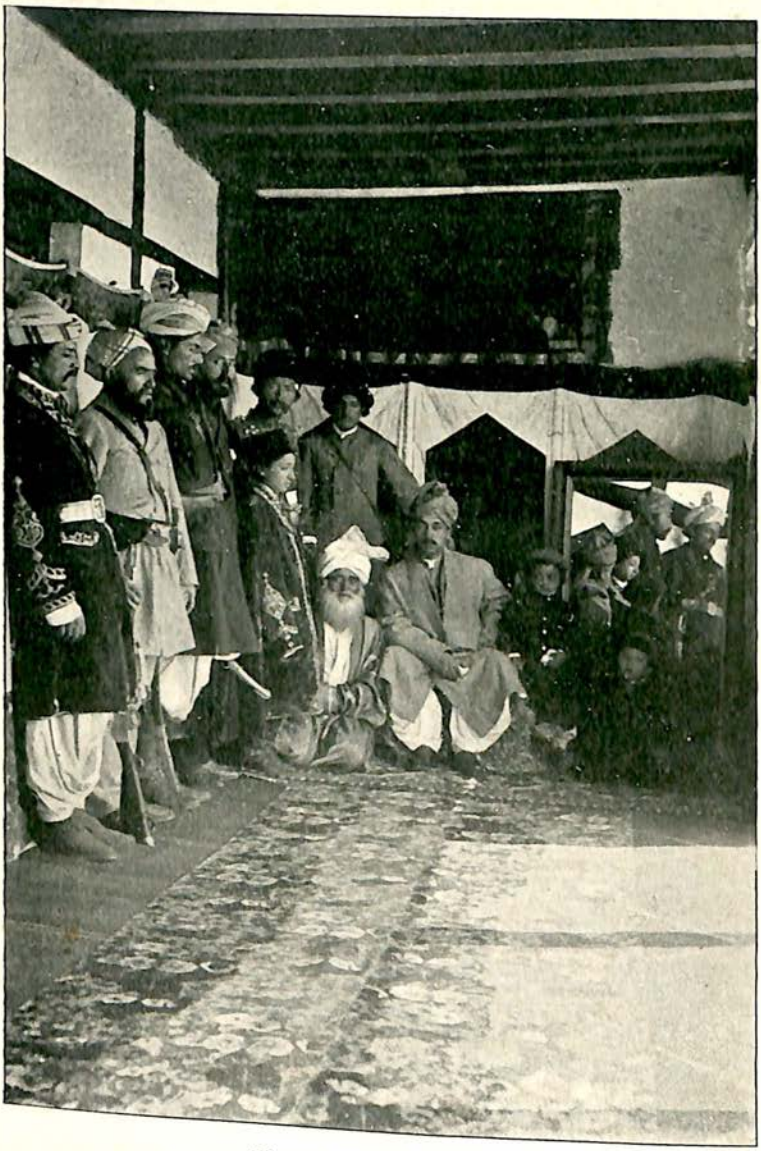
Cascading down the habitable lower slopes are numerous rivulets fed from the snow above. Let us look at the scene from high up the opposite side of the valley. First there appear, below the snow, tiny threads of silver winding through arid slopes of talus. Some 5000 feet above the river strips of light green appear, little fields cut in terraces in which the young barley is just beginning to show itself. A few huts are seen lower down and some gaunt poplars, a cold and dreary upland country. Farther down, the strip of green darkens in colour and gradually broadens. Chestnut, apricot, and other fruit-bearing trees appear, at first scattered, but becoming more numerous, till, at the river's edge, the cultivated fan spreads out to a couple of miles or more in breadth, a variegated mass of golden corn, orchards, and vineyards, with the little villages half hidden in foliage. Often two or more of these fans join, forming bands of verdure some miles in length. Chitral itself is composed of several of such fans merged into one, and most Chitrali villages are of the same type. In the south of Chitral, where the rainfall is greater, the hillsides, at elevations favourable to the growth of conifers, are clothed in pine forests, and the scenery is

consequently less wild and more alpine in character.

Let us now make a closer inspection of one of these Chitrali villages. It is entered by a bridle-path, across which a little brooklet zigzags from side to side in independent fashion, serving to conduct the water of the neighbouring streams to the lower cultivated terraces. Magnificent horse-chestnut trees cast a shadow delightful to the traveller after the heat and glare of the bare hill-side, and the air is filled with the murmur of running water and the scent brought out of foliage by a burning sun. On either side the path are walled enclosures, and a stranger, by standing up in his stirrups, can see over into one of the Chitrali gardens famed all over the Western Himalaya. It is in reality more an orchard than a garden, but one with exquisitely kept turf. At one end is the flat-roofed house where lives the owner, and farther off the buildings which give shelter, if he be of the upper class, to his serfs. Presently he will arrive at an open space where, sitting on raised seats round a gigantic chestnut, the greybeards of the village sit and discuss the latest doings in Chitral. Farther on the polo-ground is entered, a long, narrow, rectangular enclosure with walled sides, at present deserted but for a party

of lusty urchins who are playing the national game on foot.

My camp had the evening before been pitched in one of the gardens surrounding the castle belonging to the lord of the manor. Taking leave of it with regret, I ride out through a narrow door into the paved courtyard, and a few yards farther find myself on the polo-ground. The Mehtar and his retinue are already approaching from the farther end, preceded by the pipers of the village. The Mehtar himself, a not unpleasing-looking young man, is dressed simply as usual in the Chitrali *choga* and rolled cap, for him made of the exquisite silky homespun that is reserved for the royal house. He is mounted on a handsome Arab that had been presented to him by an English "Lord Sahib." His equipment is of the latest Badakshan fashion. The saddle is covered with red velvet worked with gold embroidery, and the arch, crupper, and breastplate glitter with plates of silver. Slung by a loop to his wrist is the usual silver-mounted Yarkandi whip. His dress is finished off by long crinkled boots, the foot part of which is formed of a separate pair of high-heeled and square-toed slippers, which can easily be discarded on entering a house. His attendants and courtiers are more gaily attired in Bokhara silks and velvets, with gold-embroi-



The Mehtar and retinue.

dered turbans and high Afghan boots. They are excellently mounted on the breedy-looking animals that are imported from Badakshan, and are known by this name, though actually bred in the Khatgan district of Afghan Turkestan. At a short distance behind are the men-at-arms forming the Mehtar's bodyguard, an irregular lot of footmen armed with Snider rifles, and dressed each one according to his own fancy. The *mir-shikar*, or head falconer, is also here with a peregrine on his fist, and another attendant with a leash of greyhounds,—the "Tazi" hounds that used to form part of the tribute to the Suzerain State of Kashmir. Most gorgeous of all, perhaps, is the court tailor, who has evidently been given *carte blanche* in the framing of his own dress regulations, and had accordingly run riot in gold lace and brass fittings.

After the usual salutations and inquiries we started off on the short march to the next camp, preceded by the pipes, which echoed and re-echoed through the valley in the cold morning air. As to the road itself, it was as bad as Chitrali roads usually are. About a foot broad, up hills so steep that a firm grasp of the mane is not only an assistance but a necessity, and down hills at such an angle that there appears nothing in front but an empty void; often one

foot hanging over a sheer drop of hundreds of feet; along crazy wooden galleries hanging on to walls of rock, through the chinks in which the river can be seen boiling below. It is a Chitrali's "swagger" never to dismount where a pony can get a foothold at all; and some of the places where a Chitrali pony can go would turn the quadruped that some years ago used to perform under the name of "the Blondin donkey" ill with fear. Riding along one of these roads is therefore not an amusement for people with nerves. The road is not all like this, however; often it winds on the level through fields and villages, orchards and vineyards. It is variety that pleases, and here one can often experience three of the seasons in a single day. Where high up the road creeps along the mountain-side at a dizzy elevation above the river, whose roar is borne faintly upwards on the breeze, it is early spring, with snow lying in patches here and there, and the young barley just beginning to show its head; 2000 feet lower, one is in the land of blossoms, and the air is full of the scent of flowers and the hum of bees busy among wild roses such as are seen nowhere else; while down close to the roaring river crops are being cut, and the apricot-trees are breaking with their golden load. Chitral, indeed, is in summer the realisation of the poet's ideal—

A joyous land,
Where waters gushed and fruit-trees grew,
And flowers put forth a fairer hue.

It was along such a road that our cavalcade wound through the country-side. In the van were the drums and pipes, the Mehtar's bodyguard following; all playing in turn and keeping up a song with chorus, one after another taking up the air. This lasted from start to finish.

"The players go before, the minstrels follow after." In the midst, unfortunately, were no "damsels playing on timbrels." A few years ago there might have been, but the retirement of the ladies of Chitral from public view took place almost simultaneously with the appearance of an Indian force of occupation in the country. The introduction of the *purdah* system into Chitral was in fact the first sign of the disappearance of local colour and customs, which is bound to take place.

The time and tune kept by our minstrels were excellent, and though the air was Oriental the effect some little distance behind was not unpleasing. When the nature of the ground permitted, one or two of them would step aside and execute a *pas* on the side of the road. One magnificent young chap with a jolly sunburnt face, black eyes, red lips, and a wide laughing

mouth displaying a magnificent set of teeth, dressed in dirty white robes with a brilliant chintz jacket, particularly attracted my attention. Absolutely unconscious of himself, and perfectly happy, he revelled in the extravagant postures of the dance, and shouted from pure joy of living.

The passion these people have for music and dancing is extraordinary, and this not as a spectacle, but as a pastime. They have also a great love of flowers: young and old bind blossoms in their rolled caps, their favourites being roses or the delightfully scented eleagnus that is so common in Chitral. Can any one doubt that in their veins flows Macedonian blood?[1] It frequently happened on the march that a shout would make us look up to see a bare-legged goat-herd come flying down the hill with an offering of marvellously scented roses, white, red, and yellow.

We were nearing our camp for the day when a horseman appeared coming towards us accompanied by a single attendant. Presently, coming closer, he dismounted, and running forward salaamed low to the Mehtar. Rather mock humility, I fear; it was Shazada Lais, the leading *pir* of the Maulai sect of Mohammedans of these parts.

[1] Local tradition is to the effect that Alexander the Great passed through this country.

He numbered half Chitral among his disciples, and lived in a style not inferior to the chief himself,—the "turbulent priest" that so often figures in history. Originally a political refugee from over the border, he had been given land in one of the northern valleys in Chitral, and from the first wielded tremendous influence among all classes of Chitralis that belonged to the "Ismaili" persuasion—and not altogether unnaturally, seeing that their hopes of salvation rested to no small extent on his good offices with the Creator. And so he had come to be a thorn in the sides of his benefactors. A clever man, but no ascetic. He was, no doubt, in agreement with the "friar of orders grey," who gave out as his firm belief that living a good life, and living well, were much the same thing.

And now rounding a corner, we saw a crowd of people massed on a gentle eminence, over which the road ran, some seven or eight hundred yards farther on. A curious undulating motion appeared to animate them, and there was the faint sound of a chorus. Approaching nearer, we saw the swaying mass in the middle of the crowd to be a number of men linked tightly together, arm in arm, performing a grotesque dance, every fifth step of which they almost sank down to the ground, keeping time the while with their voices.

This song and dance is reserved for receptions of the Chitrali chief. The rest of the crowd, lined up on either side of the dancers, discharged their matchlocks in the air, holding their pieces at the "port." Further on we found the road thronged with sightseers, the country-side being evidently *en fête*. Near the entrance of the village a company of old dames blocked the road, each one carrying a bowl of milk and sugar. As we approached, the leading lady advanced, stirring vigorously with a big wooden spoon, apparently wishing to feed her royal master; but she was repulsed, not unkindly, and retired. The crowd now closed round, our bridles were seized, and we were taken to the polo-ground. Here, opposite the dais, a tall pole had been erected, to the top of which was attached a small silver gourd filled with sand. To the thunder of the drums horseman after horseman darted past at full speed—now a noble in rustling silk and glittering silver accoutrements, now a retainer in modest homespun, each discharging his piece at the mark. As the matchlocks frequently hung or missed fire, and were, after passing the pole, indiscriminately whirled round the rider's head, a prudent man will, when the pastime is indulged in, get behind the nearest tree or even behind a stout friend. Four or five had passed

without hitting the mark, when a cousin of the Mehtar's, who had distinguished himself during the siege of Chitral by his skill in picking off men in the fort from the high ground on the opposite bank of the river, came past with a double-barrelled breech-loader. A puff of dust from the gourd answered his shot, the crowd shouted, the pole was pulled up, and we were conducted to our respective camps. Mine was in the grounds of the castle, on a stretch of turf shaded by fine plane-trees. A Chitrali garden is no garden as understood in England; there are no flower-beds, and, except in the month of fruit-blossoms, no masses of colour,—merely soft green turf, running water, and deep cool shade. A few wild hyacinths growing by the side of the water suffice to give a touch of subdued colour in accordance with the restful spirit of the scene; for, whatever may be the necessity for colour under dull skies, there are few that have experienced the brightness and glare of the Orient that would feel disposed to criticise the Eastern preference for less obtrusive beauties.

Except during the extreme heat of the day, the garden resounds with the song of birds: one can recognise the note of the thrush and the deep mellow pipe of the golden oriole, and sometimes catch a glimpse of him as like a streak of flame he darts among the branches.

The day passed, no matter whether in the *dolce far niente* due to the presiding deity of the place, or the everlasting office-work which makes the Anglo-Indian official a standing wonder to the Oriental mind. One incident, however, characteristic of the people must be related.

An old man came into the garden, and, after the usual salaams, explained that he was a native of Mastuj, a district not under the Mehtar's rule. He had not very wisely married a young wife, who a few days ago had eloped with a noble who was a subject of the Mehtar. I explained my sympathy with his misfortunes, but did not see in what way I could assist, as it was his own special privilege to hunt the guilty couple down and slay them. Oh, he explained, I could help him very materially,—his wife and her paramour were now concealed within this very castle walls: as for killing them, he desired no such thing; all he wanted was that the erring wife should be handed over to him, when all would be forgiven and the lady received back into his own home. But by doing so, it was explained, he would forfeit the right of taking revenge on the ruiner of his home, as the universal rule among the tribesmen of the North-West Frontier is that they must kill both parties or neither. Revenge, however, it appeared, was far from his thoughts; all he wanted was his

own wife. The owner of the castle was accordingly summoned. On being apprised of the reason he had been "remembered," "Certainly," he said, "the young *Adamzada* (noble) and his lady have now been under my roof these three days; if the old man wishes their death, it is his right; but to surrender the girl—such dishonour could not be supported: the young couple, too, are willing to die together, but they will not be parted."

From the expressions of the bystanders, it was plain that the errant lovers had their entire sympathies. A man so mean-spirited as to forgo revenge and ask for the restitution of his wife was beyond the pale altogether. At this moment the old man, now shedding bitter tears, was joined by some more patriarchs from his own district, who added to the clamour, and begged for the restoration of the girl; otherwise, they said, all their young wives would be carried off by Chitrali Adamzadas, and things would be as they were in the days of the old Mehtars, when the serf had no rights.

This was a conundrum. To regard the lady as a chattel, to be handed back to her husband irrespective of her own wishes, was repugnant to English ideas; on the other hand, Chitrali nobles could not be allowed to carry off the wives of

their Mastuj neighbours with impunity. It was indeed awkward, this lack of blood-thirstiness on the part of the husband. There was no "local custom" to meet such a case. A happy thought here occurred, to hand the case over to the *Kazi*[1] to decide, and no sooner thought of than done. In the evening he returned to pronounce judgment. This was, after the requisite number of quotations from the Koran had been rolled off, that both the lady and her paramour having been guilty of the crime of adultery, should be stoned to death—a truly Gilbertian sentence, that made even the Chitralis shout with laughter, though the *Kazi's* countenance remained unmoved.

To cut a long story short, I finally decreed that the husband should have his wish and his wife. I afterwards heard that the forgiven wife went off quite happily with her lawful spouse, not indeed repentant, but shrieking with laughter at the thought of her spree; while her Lothario in an agony of woe stabbed himself about the breast—not so deeply, however, as to do any more material harm to his already lacerated heart.

The dub-dub of the kettle-drums and the skirl of the pipes began to sound on the polo-ground

[1] *Kazi*=Islamic judge.

about four o'clock, summoning every one to the national game. In Chitral and the adjacent countries every village has its polo-ground, in spite of the fact that there is frequently but barely sufficient cultivated land to support the inhabitants. Every one that possesses a pony plays, and those that have not risen to this height of affluence have a separate game on foot. The game as played in the Himalaya has been so often described that I will not do so here. Suffice it to say, that though the glimpses of the players a stranger to the game may catch amid the clouds of dust, give but a confused impression of a *mêlée* of wild horsemen with hair and garments streaming in the wind, shouting, galloping madly, recklessly, here and there, accompanied by the clash of sticks and the click of the hit ball, and the constant crescendo and diminuendo of the band, the game is really played with a very high degree of skill. The force and accuracy with which these hillmen hit on both sides of the pony with their short heavy sticks is certainly not exceeded anywhere.

The ponies are strong, wiry little beasts, with wonderful stamina—those from Khatgan, whose reputation extends over the greater part of Central Asia, being the best.

The game lasts till one or the other side has

obtained nine goals, during which time no periods of rest are called and ponies may not be changed. It is not surprising, therefore, that in this country the quality most prized in a pony is staying power.

Once at the annual "Highland games" at Gilgit a pony race-course was laid out five miles in length, but this was objected to by many of the competitors on the ground that it was too short to bring a good pony to the front, and so it had to be lengthened!

Activity also is a quality that commends itself in this country. Lying near the track up the Yarkhun River valley is an irregular-shaped detached rock, a little higher than a dining-room table and just large enough for a pony to stand on with difficulty. When I first passed this way, I was surprised to see several of the Chitralis riding with me go off the road and jump their ponies on to the rock, one after the other. Most of them managed to get on, but few of them to remain there. I then learnt that the stone was "*Ali Khan o bohrt rupini*"—"Ali Khan's jumping stone." It was a well-known test of a good pony to jump on the rock and stay there.

The polo over, a hollow square was formed in front of the dais, and dancing began. Before the professionals have their turn, the losers at polo have to dance for the amusement of the crowd.

They generally affect the greatest reluctance to do so, and though there are few Chitralis that are not really proficients, a forced performance of this sort causes them unlimited shame, and they kick up their heels and wave their arms in an exaggerated failure to imitate the more or less graceful dance of the country. Chitralis of even the highest rank are not excused, and officials holding appointments corresponding to those of our Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief may on occasions be seen capering about for the edification of the crowd. Sometimes instead of dancing they have to pay forfeit. I once saw the Mehtar's foster-brother, a fine handsome youth in big Afghan boots and a flowing robe of Bokhara silk, decline to dance. He was accordingly made to stand on a high stone, his cap was doffed for him, and the crier, addressing himself to the crowd of women that lined the walls, proclaimed in a loud voice, "Oh ladies, here you see the Mehtar's own foster-brother, a beautiful youth that we hear is more at home in the boudoir than he is on the polo-ground." The regular dancing followed, and by the time all was over, the sun was sunk behind the purple mountains, a faint rosy light only lingering on the highest snow-peaks; by-and-by this also faded and grew cold, the call to even-

ing prayer resounded, flocks straggled in, and with darkness a silence fell over the whole village.

To-night, however, there was to be an assembly in the big house, and the post-prandial cigarette had barely been lighted when the sound of the kettle-drums again arose within the walls and the grey-bearded *aksakal* came to conduct me to the assembly.

Passing from the garden into the castle by a narrow postern, I was conducted through a maze of narrow passages and small chambers. Most of these were empty, but in some men-at-arms were stretched out in sleep, while one had occupants in the shape of half a dozen hawks on their perches, blinking their eyes at the sudden light, their attendants, never far from their beloved charges, chatting in an adjoining chamber.

We found the central courtyard lighted by bonfires and torches made of strips of flaming pitch-pine. The Mehtar and his company were already seated on carpets forming one side of a square, the other three sides of which were filled in by a miscellaneous Chitrali crowd; in the centre of all a large fire. After being seated, and inquiring with the greatest *empressement* after each other's health, although we had parted barely two hours ago, the performance began. The first item

was a masque, Pathan traders *en route* to India robbed by Kafirs.

The traders are passing with their animals along the deserted road; evening falls, and loads are taken off. Being pious followers of Islam, prayer-carpets are spread, and having "fixed their attention," after which they should have become oblivious to all mundane matters, they become absorbed in their devotions. Their absorption, however, does not prevent their looking round every now and then to guard against the approach of their hereditary enemies, the Kafirs—a want of trust in Providence that is received with shouts of laughter by the Chitrali audience, who "care for none of these things."

When they are asleep, barefoot Kafirs come on dancing and loot the caravan. Pursuit follows; the Kafirs are surrounded by Afghan troops and killed, and the soldiers walk off with the spoil—no doubt a frequent ending to such episodes in real life.

Dancing then began. One after another the trained dancing-boys stepped into the square, performed their tolerably graceful gyrations in the flickering light of the torches, and retired into the darkness.

The scene was a picturesque one. In front the rows of dark wild faces lighted up by the wavering

light, which could barely penetrate the gloom of the surrounding walls. The light was just sufficient to reveal a projecting balcony screened by trellis-work, behind which, no doubt, the ladies of the castle had a good view of the goings-on. The sky formed a canopy above us, into the star-spangled square of which the smoke from the fires curled steadily upwards in the still air.

The performers on these occasions are invariably of the male sex, the best being the dancing-boys that form part of the household of every Chitrali of position. Unlike Pathans, in whose eyes dancing is, to say the least, undignified, Chitralis all dance, and like Western nations think no shame of it. The "principal boy" this evening was the servant of the *Mehtarjau*, who was our host and the proprietor of the castle. He was a slight handsome boy, with his hair dressed in curls after the Persian fashion. The *Mehtarjau*, who was sitting next to me, and was himself considered in Chitral a poet and musician of no mean order, was evidently very proud of him, and when his turn was finished was at pains to explain that he was nervous at so many spectators, and had not been dancing up to his true form. I was happily able to remember a verse from Hafiz appropriate to the occasion, and he sat back with a satisfied smile.

The dancers having all retired, music began. The band consisted of some six or eight string instruments made from yellow gourds rather like the zither in shape, and two tambourines without the jingle. The singers were three in number, all tenors. Swaying their bodies to and fro, and keeping time with a gentle clapping of the hands, they soon got into the swing of the Chitrali *gazal*, and with half-closed eyes became lost to all but their own melody. The general effect is not bad if listened to in the way all Eastern music should be, or rather not listened to,—for the art of enjoying the music of the Orient is to assume an absolutely passive attitude, and allow the sounds to be borne into one's ears without the mental effort of listening.

After one rather pleasing air the *Mehtarjau* inclined himself towards me.

"My own composition," he whispered.

I congratulated him. This scion of nobility was himself an excellent performer on the *sitar*, and delighted the audience later on by himself taking the instrument in hand and producing some very good effects out of it.

"Call not his *sitar* a gourd," says a Persian poet, "but a golden bowl, filled to the brim with the wine of song!"

Refreshments were brought, and the evening

wore on. For my part, remembering that I had to march on the morrow, and that a Chitrali *bazam* lasts till morning, I left the company early, and was lulled to sleep in my tent in the garden by the faint sound of music, continued, no doubt, till the flush of dawn.

THE STORIES OF TWO IBEX.

I WAS after ibex for the first time in my life. For two days we had been looking for a herd which, as tracks showed us, frequented the crags at the head of the glen where my tent was pitched, but so far without success. This evening, however, the faint tinkle of a falling stone drew my shikari's telescope in the right direction.

"Follow," he said, "the next ridge to the one we are on, right up to the top, where the patches of snow begin: you will see a big rock like a fort: they are on that."

The directions were unmistakable, and I was soon reaching for the big telescope to see them better.

What a thrill the sight of any new game animal gives one! Not indeed like one's first of all; for whether he be a Scotch stag or the modest but not less sporting black buck of India, that is a sensation that comes once only in a lifetime. Of course the ibex looked enormous. They were

lying down on the top of a big rock that rose up from a confused mass of crags, which reminded one, as the shikari said, of the crenelated walls of some mediæval fort. As the ibex moved their heads, their horns looked like curved scimitars against the sky, turning this way and that. Their fort was quite impregnable as far as we were concerned, for let alone the fact that the wind was wrong, our approach, whichever side we made it, would be visible to the keen eyes of watchful sentries.

So I had to be content to sit and watch my first herd, till the shadows began to steal along the hillsides and throw gigantic shapes on the opposite side of the valley.

That was the day I first heard the call of the snow-cock,[1] the very embodiment of the spirit

[1] The Himalayan snow-cock, *Tetraogallus Himalayensis*, is a magnificent bird somewhat bigger than a guinea-fowl. I have often thought the experiment of introducing him into Scotland ought to be tried. Their plumage is speckled grey, but when their square tail is cocked up, as they frequently carry it, a mass of pure white downy feathers is displayed which is very conspicuous from a distance. They live just below the snow-line, and their food consists principally of mosses or the insects found therein. They are generally seen by the big-game hunter whilst in pursuit of ibex and markhor; but a day after them with a rook rifle affords not bad fun and very hard exercise. In the Yasin district, where they abound, the natives drive them from hill to hill while the snow is on the ground, and by a skilful arrangement of beaters, can tire them out and then knock them on the head. They are excellent eating, but should be hung as long as possible.

of the mountains. It is a fine day; listen to them laughing and chortling high up above your head like a party of schoolgirls. Presently a "tiip, tiip, tiip"; a great rush of wings and they come sailing over your head. There they go, "tiip, tiip, tiip, tyrrhio—tyrrhio—tyrrhio," in a splendid curve straight across the gulf to the opposite side of the valley. Another day you sit huddled up peering into a wet fog of cloud that is almost rain. The vapours weave themselves fantastically round the near rocks, but the surrounding mountains are blotted out, or are only seen as disappearing pictures in the caverns of the mist. Your stalker's heart attunes itself to the scene, for there is nothing to be done to-day. You are depressed by an eerie feeling of remoteness engendered by the silence and the solitude. Somewhere from out of the mist, you know not where, comes a long-drawn mournful whistle. The snow-cock is calling to the *jinns* of mist and mountain that are surely abroad to-day.

Towards evening the ibex one by one got up, took a look down and began to descend, first slowly and then more quickly, till by the time they reached the deep green grass, they had lost all their stateliness and apparently all their caution. The procession became a scramble, and

down they rushed, the little ones larking about and tumbling over one another like a pack of school children let loose. But it was too dark for a stalk, and we left them scattered about the alpine pastures below us. My first shot at ibex looked almost a certainty for to-morrow, and my dinner off a roast leg of *urial* shot a few days before, and the "tappio" pudding beloved of Eastern *chefs*, might have been an alderman's feast for all I knew or cared. After dinner a pipe, and I went outside to look at the weather before turning in. It was a glorious night. The crescent moon was just setting behind a queer-shaped mountain the other side of the Astor river, and the dark mass took to my ibex-heated imagination the resemblance of a gigantic buck lying down, with the moon his golden horn.

But alas for youth's imaginings! Next morning, when I should have been getting up with the first glimmer of light in the east, the patter-patter of rain on the tent made me spring from my bed and poke my head out between the flaps. Black as Jorrock's cupboard was the morning, and pouring dismally. Five o'clock and daylight showed no change, but a sea of mist and clouds enveloping my camp, and so my hope of ibex fled for that day. How the time dragged! Eleven o'clock saw my gun and rifles polished



A sea of mist and clouds.

and speckless, one o'clock my correspondence all finished. By three o'clock I had smoked more tobacco than was good for any one who wanted heart and lungs in climbing order. The day was long, but it passed, and evening closed in still wet. Stalking in mist and rain with the wind blowing in all directions at once was a hopeless impossibility, and it was no use going out either that day or the next. Wet weather when in camp among the mountains is abominable. Wet tents, wet clothes, wet carpets, wet dogs, food smoked instead of cooked, are some of the ills one has to laugh at, and the acme of comfort one's imagination can depict is a dry room with a fire in it, and an arm-chair before that fire.

On the third day rain had stopped, and patches of blue sky—oh, how welcome!—had appeared, though the great clouds still rolled in the valley below us, and at times enveloped us in a dense wet mist. Our ibex had in the meantime shifted their quarters, and were discovered among some black jagged-looking rocks at the opposite side of the glen we were in. Early next morning we were on our way across the valley, knee-deep in sopping grass and flowers and mountain vegetation. The rain had been snow only a few hundred feet above us, but the white line was quickly creeping up the slopes under the intermittent

gleams of sunshine. The weather still threatened, however, and before we had gone across the valley we had been soaked through by a heavy burst of rain. We pushed on through it all, and by the time we reached the rocks they were again glistening in the sun. We found an almost perpendicular ridge which had to be surmounted to get a view into the ravine where the ibex had been seen. I found my nailed boots would not bite on the wet rocks, so off they came, and the climb was begun in my stockings. With a shoulder to stand on there, and a hand-pull here, we got along somehow or other; but it was desperately bad going, and nearly at the end a smooth wall of rock almost stopped us; but thanks to my shikaris, after half an hour's struggle the top was reached, and I found myself, rather to my surprise, lying, rifle in hand, gazing across a hundred and fifty yards of air at three big ibex lying on a dry ledge of rock opposite me. From the point of view which connects hill shooting with precipices, it was quite the typical ibex ground, and though I have shot much in the Himalaya since my first essay after ibex, I cannot recollect a more awesome but pictorially appropriate scene. Great naked black cliffs rose up out of the mist on all sides. Our heads projected over a sheer drop, the bottom of which could not

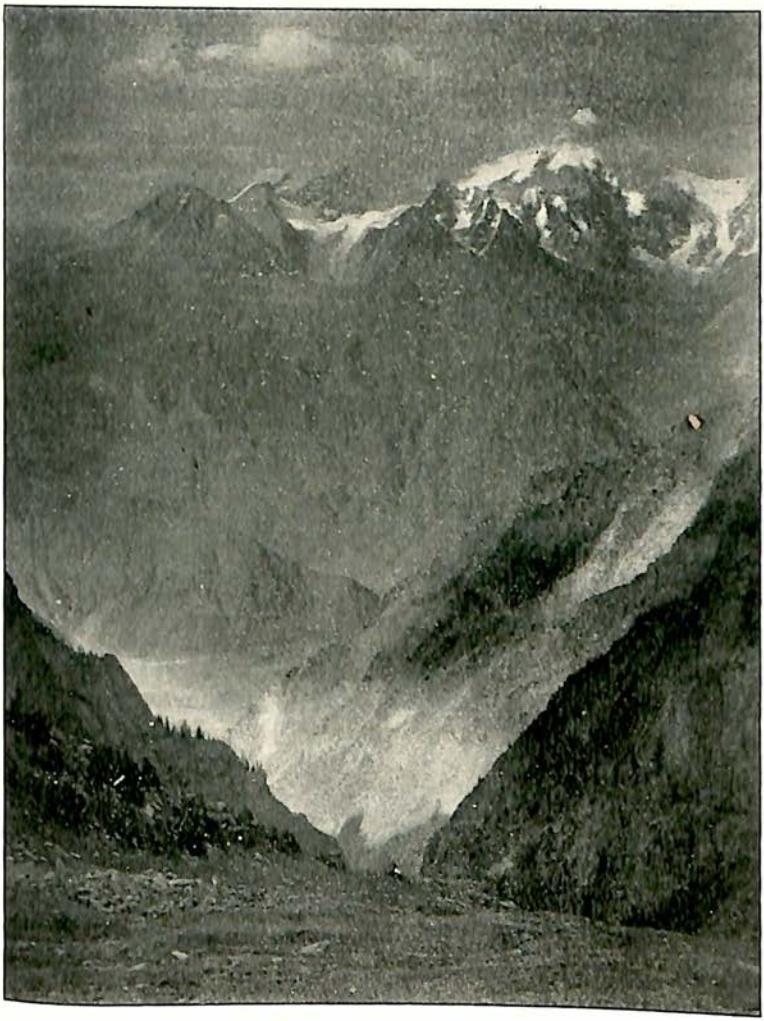
be seen. Opposite us where the ibex lay, a wall of rock abutting up to a dizzy height overhung the chasm. The noise of loud rushing waters filled our ears, and from every crevice and gully streams flung themselves into space, but swept away by currents of air, became wreaths of smoke before they could touch rock again. My imagination as to the sort of ground ibex *ought* to be shot on was thoroughly satisfied, and all that remained was to do it. I wanted to take my shot there and then as they were, lying down; but my shikari—not at that time Gul Sher—insisted on my waiting till they rose and gave me a broadside shot. We should perhaps have whistled them to their feet, but did not. So, wet and shivering with cold and excitement, I waited, and just when I least expected it the ibex rose simultaneously to their feet, moved along their gallery, and were gone. A puff of air had no doubt told them of our presence. It seemed like a moment of time, but I had fired two aimed shots and both misses! We never saw those ibex again, and next day I had to return to Gilgit. Thus ended my first stalk.

Let me ask my readers to accompany me now on another stalk. It was some six years after the episode of which an account has been given. I had in the meantime been almost continually

employed on duty in the best shooting-grounds in the Further Himalaya, and had shot many ibex, and good heads among them too, but not the enormous one with fifty-inch horns that figured in my day-dreams.

Our summer camp had been pitched near the head of the lovely Harpai glen, about the place where the junipers begin to grow scarce and the valley spreads into open stretches, in the soft bottoms of which grass, mosses, and flowers grew deep. A charming camp it was. One could look across fifty miles of pine-clothed valleys and ridges to where the great white cone of Dobani rose beyond the Gilgit spur, and by climbing up to the pass at the head of the valley one could see half a dozen or more peaks of over 24,000 feet cleaving the sky, and among them the giant crest of Nanga Parbat.

Ibex and markhor were, of course, our main interest, and though the cares of a district prevented my being always on the wander, it was rare that we had not news of the existence somewhere in the neighbourhood, of a mighty old buck of one or other of the wild goats. Indeed, the story of that summer camp is, in the main, the history of attempts to compass the death of two remarkably fine beasts—one a markhor and the other an ibex. It is with the latter that this story deals.



The white cone of Dobanni.

We were playing golf one evening on the links round our camp, certainly the highest though not the worst course in the world, when Gul Sher, who had been roaming about with telescope and binoculars, turned up and took my clubs.

Gul Sher was a character, and should have been born a Scotchman, although, loth as I am to confess evil of him, he did not appreciate golf. The end in view seemed to him so disproportionate with the pains taken in attaining it. All the same he used frequently to carry my clubs, and did not hesitate to criticise freely, but he would not drop the language of the rifle. When we topped a ball we were told we had "gone high," and when we dug into the ground we were told to take a "finer sight"; but the absence of a second barrel, after some such a contretemps, always seemed to him an unredeemable blot on the game.

As we were going round, he gradually allowed it to become apparent that he had seen a real monster ibex among the high crags known as Kinechuch, that overhung the valley six or seven miles below our camp. He was an ibex of great age, his winter coat not yet shed, and with horns not less than six spans in length. Gul Sher had seen him one day, but he had been gone the next; his retreat, however, was one to which he would be

certain to return, being isolated, remote, and precipitous.

Next morning, taking my shooting tent and kit for a few days, I went down the valley, through forests of juniper and cedar, and then, turning up to the right, crossed a high bare pass leading to the Gasho valley, from which the Kinechuch ridge could be attacked. It looked formidable. A high black razor-edge of slate, bare of all vegetation for a couple of thousand feet above our heads, in length three miles or more. From the side we were to attack it—which was the reverse of that the ibex were on—the ridge looked very steep and rather awesome, but on essaying it next morning we found it easier than it appeared, and a couple of hours' scramble over sharp jutting-out angles of slate, forming easy but treacherous footing, and loose jangling *débris* of the same, brought us to the top. Here quite a different kind of ground awaited us. The drop down the opposite side was almost sheer, being parallel with the dip in the slate, and gave no foothold of any kind. The precipice fell straight down for five to eight hundred feet or so, and then the naked rock was buried under a less steep slope of old avalanche snow. Below this came alpine pastures falling away down into pine forests two or three thousand feet below us. Sharp ridges ran down at

frequent intervals into the pastures, forming a series of corries—altogether an ideal haunt for ibex. It was in one of these that the big fellow had been seen. So we walked along the razor-edge, or rather just behind it, examining every ravine in turn. Ibex we found in plenty, but not the one we were after. From the edge of the ridge, where it fell away abruptly, we retraced our steps and went back to the other end, and were rewarded by seeing—nothing. So back we went to camp. There was not anything surprising in this: big ibex are not picked up every day, and, as Gul Sher remarked, "If not to-day, then to-morrow or the next day; but find him we shall." But he was there neither on the morrow nor the day after. The Kinechuch ridge was then abandoned, and in the next few days all the likely ground on that water-parting was examined; but with no result, and the pursuit of the big ibex was dropped for the time. A fortnight or more later Gul Sher found him again in the same spot, and again I laid myself out for his destruction. The evening before he had been there, but when I went up the ridge he was gone — vanished as mysteriously as before. However, I determined to look yet another day before again dropping his pursuit; and this time, if the big one was not to be seen, we agreed I was to shoot one or other of

the smaller ibex on the other side. So up we went. Proceeding our usual round, first to the east, we came on a herd of ibex among which was a fair head—a good one anywhere else,—which I judged to be about forty-two inches, or perhaps a shade more. My faith in the big one was growing faint. "I'll shoot that one," I remarked; "a bird in the hand, anyhow."

"Good, Sahib," said Gul Sher; "if you will wait here with the second shikari, I will go to the end of the ridge and have one more look, and if you don't see me wave my coat, go round and shoot him."

The old man disappeared, and I lay and ate my cold mutton, and watched the herd lying peacefully below us chewing the cud and little recking of danger. We waited a couple of hours and no signs of Gul Sher, when just as we were preparing to move, a black dot moved out into a patch of snow at the extreme end of our ridge. Gul Sher, no doubt, and a look through the glasses discovered him furiously waving his coat. Over the loose slates we clattered, sending small avalanches down the hill, working slowly round the dizzy corners and running over the slopes of shale till, in an hour's time we arrived, somewhat blown, to where Gul Sher was sitting. His face and nod

were enough, and words superfluous. The ridge here turned at a right angle, forming on the inside a snow-filled gully and on the outside a steep cliff, a thousand feet or so in height, of broken rocks. It was on the latter the ibex were lying.

Gul Sher had the telescope propped up on the ridge crest, and I crawled up and applied my eye. There were two ibex in the field of view, and one of them was the monster, with horns forming an almost complete circle, though reaching right back behind his shoulders,—a truly magnificent head, measuring fifty inches *at least*. They were lying facing us, and a lot of does and kids were scattered all about and around. The herd was about five hundred yards away, and so we worked without further ado along the ridge towards them. The wind was in our faces, but dark clouds had appeared on the horizon, and no time was to be lost, as it might change any moment. After going a few hundred yards, a small V-shaped depression in the crest gave what seemed a good firing point; so we crept to this and looked over. The big ibex was within a hundred yards of us, still lying facing us, but with head and a portion only of his chest visible. I might have taken the shot then, but I intensely desired to

risk nothing; the herd was absolutely unalarmed; and finally, Gul Sher was against it. So we crept farther still along the ridge, to a point from where I should get a view of his red back lying not forty yards below me. With extraordinary care I crept to the edge. Nothing to be seen. I pushed myself a little farther over. At this moment there came a low growl of thunder, and—fearful thought! —I felt a breath of cold air on the back of my neck. Almost simultaneously a tremendous clatter of stones and a cloud of dust arose from below me. An exclamation of intense disgust came from Gul Sher. The hillside seemed alive with ibex, dashing at headlong speed along the cliff-side away from me. I swung my legs over the edge, to get a sitting shot at the big one when he should appear, but they seemed all small.

"There is no use looking that way," said Gul Sher; "the big one has gone down the ridge."

The shikari was standing up, looking away down the ridge through his glasses. I found the direction, and saw two ibex going hard five hundred yards away, and they were lost to view.

We followed them down the ridge,—a difficult descent that nothing but the thought of that big ibex would have induced me to make; but he had evidently not stopped, and had gone on into

the forests below. We got back to camp when it was pitch-dark, as sick and disgusted as we could well be.

That ibex did not return to his haunt the next day; nor, hunt high, hunt low, as we did for many days afterwards, did he ever once appear to me again, except in my dreams.

It is as well to be philosophic over one's shikar as in other things, and in a little Persian proverb I sometimes call to mind is embodied a deal of philosophy. It runs—

Agar shabha hamah shab i kadr budi
Shab i kadr be kadr budi:

"If every night was the 'night of miracles,' the 'night of miracles' would cease to be miraculous," and might be freely rendered, "If you could shoot an enormous ibex every day of your life, enormous ibex would no longer be worth the shooting." But as regards this particular beast, the proverb has not had its wonted efficacy, for I shall always regret his loss.

That same season I lost, by no fault of my own, a markhor which would have been the second finest I have ever shot. I got his "brother" out of the same herd, a distinctly smaller beast, which measured fifty-two inches. A deal used to be said

to Gul Sher about the loss of this markhor, and I well remember his reply: "You talk about that markhor, Sahib, but mark my words, you may find a dozen markhor like the one we lost, but you will never in your life see the like of the ibex of Kinechuch"; and I believe him.



The big markhor.

THE BIG MARKHOR.

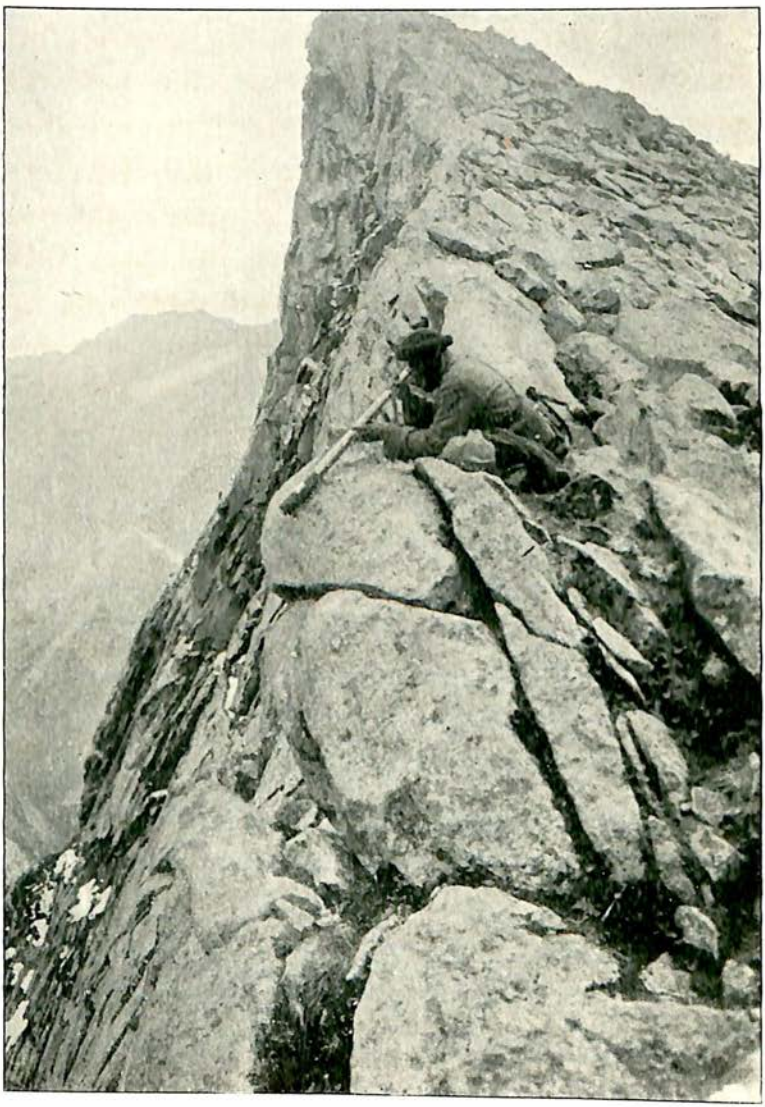
The things we know are neither rich nor rare,
But wonder how the devil they got there.

SUCH were the words which kept recurring to me as Gul Sher and I sat watching the herd from our cranny, high up in the Shingye Glen. The long telescope had been propped up on rocks and pointed towards some grassy ledges in the middle of a sheer face of rock on the opposite side of the valley three thousand yards or more away. Even with the forty-power glass the markhor appeared absurdly minute as they moved about the rocks and nibbled the dry autumn grass.

Pope's lines about the fly in amber seemed peculiarly appropriate. "How the devil," indeed! For as far as we could see there was absolutely no path leading across the great scarp of black rock to their lofty grazing ground. But where nothing else can go, the markhor, biggest and most majestic of all the wild goats, wanders with ease, to find among dizzy precipices his refuge

from wolf and snow-leopard. My stalker and I had been watching this particular herd off and on for many days, and with the greatest care, for in it was a monster like which few have been shot and fewer still could remain in the Gilgit Kohistan — or any other part of the Himalayas. He was with a herd of fourteen others, all hoary old males. But whenever we had seen them, they were always high up on this same rock face and absolutely unapproachable from any direction. A seat like Sinbad on the back of the *simurg*, or even a modern flying machine, might have served our purpose, but nothing else. Inaccessible and distant though they were, as they moved about we could distinctly see their great spiral horns against the patches of snow which lay here and there. Soon after taking up our post of observation in the early morning, we had found out that the big one was not that day with the herd, and on running through the muster, fourteen were counted instead of the full fifteen. Still, at any moment he might appear from some hidden ravine or cranny, so we settled ourselves down to a day of watching.

Old Gul Sher was no bad companion with whom to while away a long day's spying. He was not a great talker; who is that has spent his life, or the greater part of it, alone with Nature?



Gul Sher spying.

But what he did not know about the beasts, birds, and plants of this wild country was not worth knowing, and with judicious questioning he would propound it all. Then what tales he could relate of the savage deeds these valleys and mountains had witnessed before the advent of the English, not so many years ago! Of the many remote and inaccessible glens we visited together, there were few which had not been the scene of some dark tragedy. Far below us, for instance, a black dot marked a cave at the foot of the huge scarp opposite, whither a former *Ra* of Gilgit had fled for refuge, accompanied by a handful of devoted retainers. So great was his name for valour that his enemies durst not attempt to take him there, but determined to starve him out. A semicircle of low walls built of rock *débris* still remain and were visible from our perch, showing how his cruel foes watched him by day and night. After a week of starvation the chieftain surrendered with his followers, on the assurance of their lives being spared,—a promise as readily given as it was promptly broken; for all were conducted to Gilgit, and like the King of the Amalekites, hewn in pieces.

In this most difficult of all stalking, in which the quarry is nothing meaner than the king of all the race of wild goats, Gul Sher was a perfect

marvel. Of his fifty years, forty spent high up on the mountains had furrowed his face and grizzled his beard; but on the most dangerous ground his step was as sure as ever, his nerve as steady; and many was the time I found he could give me the weight of my rifle and a bad beating up a stiff hill. He began life as a goat-herd, when he would be away for days together without seeing a human face, and thus he learnt to wander about the awesome solitudes where the eagle builds its nest and the wild goat is monarch of all he surveys, as fearless of step as they. Later on he was a hunter on his own account, the most celebrated in all the Gilgit Kohistan. His weapon was the matchlock of the country, accurate up to perhaps fifty yards, and with this he stalked and shot many hundreds of these, the wildest game animals in the world. That needed more craft than is necessary in these days of Mannlichers and suchlike arms of precison. "Ah, Sahib," he used to remark, "if I had only had your rifle in those days!" to which I would reply that I was uncommonly thankful he had not!

Well, we waited and watched till evening, but the big markhor did not appear that day, nor indeed did we see him for some weeks after, though we searched high and low, and spent

many cold days sitting out examining from different points every square yard of the neighbouring valleys. I think I may safely say that never in my life was I so keen to get any beast as I was to shoot that markhor; and keen as I was, Gul Sher was even more so, for it had eluded us so often that he had begun to think that his reputation depended on getting me a shot—his face, as he said, was "blackened" till he did so.

At last came a heavy fall of snow, and when the air cleared, the patriarch was again with the herd. We were watching the party one evening as they appeared in single file out of a ravine and wandered down into a deep snow-filled ravine leading into the Shingye *nullah*. Last of all came a markhor with very long straight horns, which I picked out as the big one. Gul Sher said, "No, that is a new-comer, and by his size he must be the big one's own brother, but our old friend will not be far off." Sure enough, a hundred yards behind all emerged a markhor the like of which has rarely been seen, with a gigantic pair of horns both long and massive, looking like the gnarled branches of a tree. "That's the one," said Gul Sher, "and I should know him well." It was getting dark as the herd moved slowly down out of sight—all except the straight-horned one. He stopped behind,

standing immovable, his face down the valley towards us. Whether or no he had some mysterious suspicion of danger, who can say?

We returned to camp pretty pleased, as barring snow-leopards, which infested this glen, and accidents, I should get a shot at the big one next morning.

We were out before dawn. In order to get above the herd in the ravine where we had left them, we had to walk up the main Kargah glen for a mile and a half and then climb up to the left, crossing over a spur into the Shingye *nullah*, some 800 feet above my camp, to which there was an almost sheer drop down. We zigzagged up and down, Gul Sher leading and finding paths along dizzy ledges where paths there appeared to be none, I following, *haud passibus æquis*, my second shikari with rifle and lunch coming last. Gul Sher knew every inch of the ground we were on — it used to be his own hunting-ground in the old days — else, covered with snow as was every spot where snow could lie, the stalk would have been an impossibility.

There was that morning one particularly unattractive place to negotiate. The ledge, which was our only means of reaching our point, ran round a corner, to pass which the entire weight had to be thrown on one foot placed on a small



View from the Kargah glen.

corner of stone having a slight slope outwards. The sheer wall of rock afforded no hand-hold, and of course we had no rope, for in markhor stalking, though the advisability of being roped not seldom occurs, such aids would be too much of an encumbrance to be habitually carried. There was no great difficulty about the step *if* the foot did not slip, but on the ledge lay an inch or two of snow, which the shikari going first with unhesitating nerve and assurance had not improved; so about that "if" there was a note of uncertainty. It may be that it is the recollection of such moments as these, when the heart has to be hardened and the nerves taken in hand, that makes a collection of mountain trophies one's dearest possession.

We arrived at the edge of the ravine into which the herd had gone the night before as the sun topped the mountains to the south, and slowly raised ourselves to peer over. The herd was not there. After some consultation it was decided to go on to the next ridge, which they had probably crossed, when whizz! thud!—a falling stone plunged into the snow in front of us. We looked up. Nothing was visible to the naked eye, but a few seconds' examination with the glasses showed us the herd moving leisurely up a grey stone shoot far above us. Now a few steps, now a bound to

reach a high ledge, a halt to look round, and on again. They were quite safe, and knew it. To pursue them would be useless, and to get above them at that time of year impossible; nothing remained but to return to camp or wait where we were till the evening, when, if they had not got our wind, they might come down again. We elected the latter course, and, having retired a few hundred yards to avoid an upward current of air taking the markhor news of our ambush, spent the short winter's day as comfortably as we could. Many times did we measure in anticipation that markhor's horns, but as Gul Sher said, "It was not in his fate to meet death that day." Evening came, but not the markhor, and we returned to camp cold, hungry, and disappointed.

It was not till ten days after this, during which I had twice seen the big markhor, but without its being possible to attempt a stalk, that the herd again one evening wandered into the identical ravine where we had stalked them before. Next morning was one of those glorious days one gets in the Himalaya in the depth of winter. Not a breath of wind, the sky cloudless and of the deepest blue, against which the black jagged peaks of the mountains, encrusted in lines and ridges with snow and seemingly bound in silver, stood out in the clear air with extraordinary sharpness

and brilliancy. Below the crests immaculate snow-fields faintly reflected in their shadows the intense blue of the sky above. The silence was only broken by the deep gurgling of the torrent near our camp under thick ice, and by the cries of a flock of ravens which were wheeling round and round at an immense height above our heads.

I was finishing the square meal with which a wise man never omits, whatever the hour, to strengthen the inner man before commencing a day on the mountains, when Gul Sher, who had been up before dark, walked into camp. He had been up the opposite side of the valley with the glasses to assure himself that our herd had not moved during the night, and brought the welcome news that the fifteen were together in the ravine they had entered the previous evening, and that the big one was with them.

After warming the stalker with a bowl of hot tea, the binding on of my Kashmiri grass shoes (an unequalled form of footgear for snow) was quickly completed, and we started off at a good pace. When we were nearing the top of the scarp overhanging our camp we heard above us the curious loud snort given by an alarmed markhor. A doe was staring at us from a rock a hundred yards above, and somewhat in front of where we had precipitately sat ourselves down. It was a

very anxious moment. If the frightened beast made off round the other side of the spur towards which we were going, it was odds she would give the alarm to our herd, and then good-bye to our chance of the big markhor that day; so we simply sat motionless as stones and waited. It seemed as if she would never satisfy her curiosity, for she stood without a move for a good ten minutes. At last she turned and began bounding off—and in a safe direction! And now, as it had been already late before this contretemps took place, and we did not wish to find the markhor had wandered up into their fastnesses, Gul Sher quickened the pace, and without a word or a halt we traversed the precipices that guarded the flank of the ravine that was our *objectif*. Arrived at the spot, Gul Sher took off his cap and crawled stealthily to the edge of the ridge and looked over, while I stood for a moment, face to the breeze, to regain my breath. Then crawling after Gul Sher, I reached his side and looked over. In front of us was a ravine some five hundred yards across, deep in snow, and terminating above us to our right in a black wall of rock. But it was bare of any living thing. Tracks, however, we could see with our glasses, and they showed that the herd had moved on over the opposite ridge. After assuring ourselves that there was no watchful

sentry posted on the look-out, we plunged into the deep snow and began a slow progress across the valley. It was tolerably easy going to the bottom, but the wind seemed to have drifted all the snow on to the south side, and the ascent became a struggle. The distance was short however, we had the markhor in front of us, and we floundered on. The leading man frequently sank up to his arm-pits in some hollow, and before we had gone half-way up the hill a halt was called, and this was repeated at every fifty yards or so, for there is no use trying to hold a rifle steady when it's "bellows to mend." A final struggle brought us within five yards of the top, and while I sat down to recover my wind and clear my Mannlicher from snow, Gul Sher crawled on and looked over. A nod from him showed me it was all right, and that at last I was within shot of the big markhor. On the next minute hung the result of many days' toil. After seeing to the rifle, I had meant to give myself another fifteen seconds in which to steady down after our climb, when Gul Sher whispered, "Quick, Sahib, I think they've got our wind."

I was down in the snow beside the shikari. He was trembling as if he had the ague. The markhor were on the move. Three or four were standing looking our way and the rest moving

slowly to the opposite side of the ravine. Some were already half-way up the opposite side, three hundred yards away, and making the best of their way with great bounds in the deep snow. Fifty yards ahead of the first flight, and showing the way, was our friend with the straight horns, who was not to be caught napping, and had probably been the one to start the panic. The big one was not in sight, and an exultant thought shot through me that he must be just below us, though out of sight. Half a minute's intense expectation, and he suddenly appeared—not indeed below us, but from behind a small under-feature about two hundred and fifty yards away. He stood out coal-black against the snow, but was already far for a shot, and was going straight away from us. "Shall I risk it or not?" I thought, and put the question in words to Gul Sher. "Please yourself, Sahib," he said, "*but if you shoot and miss him now, you'll never see him again.*"

He was a long way off by this time, and, terribly disappointing though it was, I determined not to shoot, but to try and get a better chance some other day, though mechanically I followed him with my rifle as he moved off. Suddenly he stopped, turned broadside on, and looked round. The sight of the rifle was covering him, and it was in the inspiration of a moment that I raised

it to above his back and my finger pressed the trigger.

The report echoed and re-echoed among the crags. I saw the markhor bound on, throwing the snow about him. But to get in a second shot was the thing, and I hastily shoved another cartridge into the breech. When I looked up again he was gone.

"Where is he?" I asked.

"I don't know, Sahib," said Gul Sher hesitatingly. "He seemed to disappear by the knot of junipers." The glasses through which we had been looking had got snow on them and were useless. "It was too far," he added, "but maybe he is wounded and will come out soon."

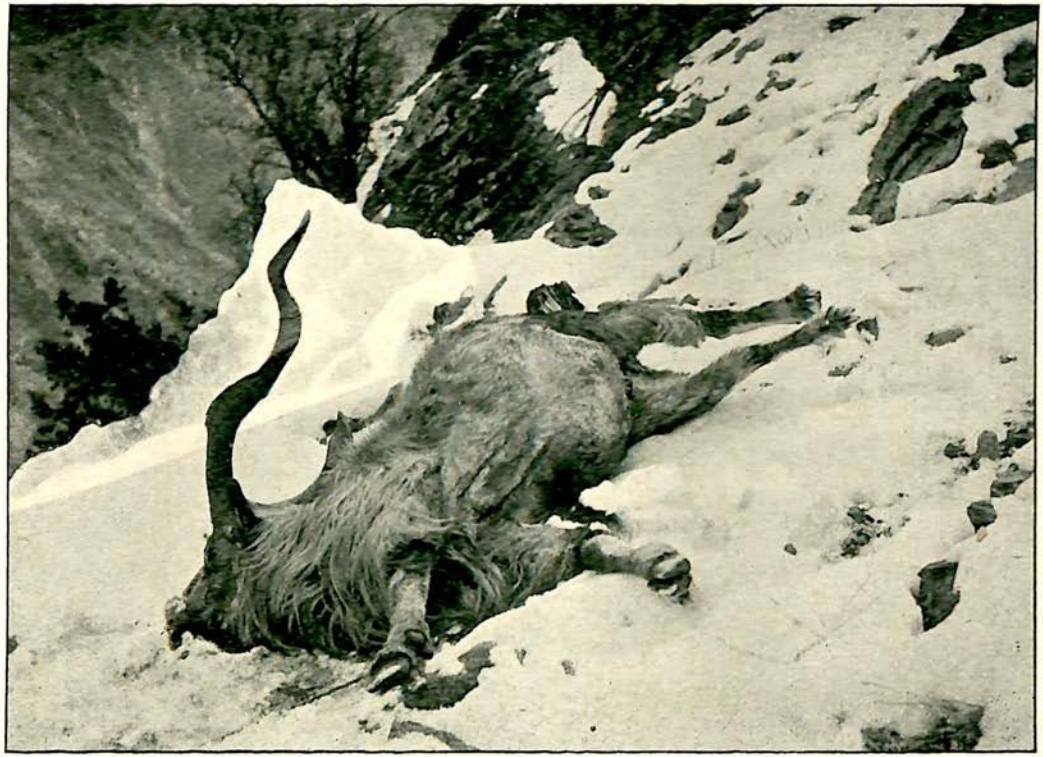
The herd were now far black specks on the snow; he surely could not be among them. We waited and waited, expecting to see him appear in the distance from behind some ridge or tree, but not a sign! But stay; did I see something move underneath that juniper, or is it the withered branch of a tree sticking out from the snow? "Go, Gul Sher, to that rock above us, and see if you can make anything out."

Gul Sher got up and went up the hill for fifty yards and sat down, carefully wiped his glasses and applied them to his eyes. Scarcely had he done so when he was on his feet again, his

face radiant and his glasses waved about his head.

"*Margya, Sahib, margya!*" (He's dead, Sahib, he's dead!) he shouted, and plunged down the snow slope, taking enormous leaps. It was a bad and dangerous journey to that juniper-tree under which the markhor lay dead, but I got over the ground in a dream. The markhor was shot through the heart, and had fallen stone-dead near the tree under which I had seen him plunge in his death run. A lucky shot indeëd! Gul Sher passed his hands over the gigantic horns. Seven spans, which the tape at home afterwards showed us to be fifty-five inches.

"Ah, Sahib," the old man said as we sat down to talk it over, "my face has been black this month past, but now it is *red!*"



The big markhor.

A DAY AFTER URIAL.

It behoves all sportsmen whose fate ordains that they shall live for a time in Baluchistan, on the Punjab frontier, in Chitral, Gilgit, and the Western Himalaya generally, to thank Providence who has given them the urial—for there is no more sporting animal under the sun. Their heads, when seen hung up in a hall, do not attract the same attention as those of their cousins of Tibet and the Pamirs, but they are in their own way very handsome. The horns are light in colour and beautifully corrugated, and when entire form two almost complete circles; but, as is the case with most wild sheep, the tips are often minus the last few inches, which have been worn or broken off.

Anything less "sheep-like" than the appearance and behaviour of the urial cannot well be imagined. Their heads certainly bear some resemblance to a sheep, in the same way as the head of a race-horse is similar to that of a donkey, but here similarity is at an end. The

body, covered with short, stiff, reddish-coloured hair, is essentially deer-like; while to understand the agility of the beast one must have seen a frightened herd dashing at full gallop over ground where the human animal can scarcely venture at all.

The writer's best acquaintance with the circular horned sheep is in the valley of the Indus, from a couple of stages beyond Leh, near the Tibetan border, at a height of 10,000 feet and more, to below Chilas, where the mighty river has fallen to 3000 feet or so above the sea. Here their country marches with that of their kinsmen the great *Ovis ammon*, and one severe winter when the latter were driven lower down the Indus than usual, the two breeds are known to have crossed, though the offspring of the union have, I am afraid, all been wiped out. It is between Leh and Chilas that the Indus, after rising north of the main Himalayan axis, bursts through this stupendous barrier. The huge rift it has worn for itself appears to one high up on either side of the valley as a great purple gulf opening before him, through the haze of which the snow-topped mountain crests of the opposite side can be seen anything from ten to forty miles away. Far below the big river washes smooth black rocks carved and hollowed into fantastic shapes

by the ceaseless action of nature's great sculptor; bays of sand and shingle, and accumulations of boulders of gigantic size. Above these come sandy rock-strewn terraces, high cliffs of yellow hardened mud, screes of loose rock fragments, and straight slopes of sand — all the *débris*, in fact, accumulated through ages from the weathering of the great mountains above. Where the slopes are gentle enough for earth to lie, the ground is covered with a scanty growth of strongly aromatic wormwood, known by different names in different localities, the pungent smell of which will always be bound up in the writer's memory with the scenes of many years' sport in the Himalaya. This is the ground beloved of urial during the winter; in parts as easy to stride over as a heathery moor at home, but elsewhere as difficult and treacherous as ground can well be.

The spot to which I would ask my readers to accompany me is some forty-five miles from Gilgit, on the narrow road which has been scraped and blasted and built along the left bank of the Indus as far as the border fort of Chilas, where it was my duty for a space to watch the doings of the lower Indus tribesmen. I was on my way thither, accompanied by Gul Sher, and had decided to spend a couple of days after the

urial which frequent the high cliffs below the junction of the Astor river with father Indus. A light wire bridge has here been thrown across the tributary stream, nearing which we dismounted to lead our ponies across. A more wild and forbidding scene it is impossible to imagine. Black perpendicular rocks ascend to an enormous height, through a narrow cleft in which, and seeming to issue from the bowels of the earth, the Astor river appears wild and foaming. The bridge is hung across at the river's narrowest part, and it is here the rapids assume their most terrific aspect. No one crossing the frail-looking structure can help but pause a moment to look down and wonder, and be fascinated by the tumult of yellow water below him. At any rate we did, and in doing so I could not help speculating on the result of the breaking of the wire strand on which we leant. How many seconds of life would remain to any one falling in amongst the spouting, boiling waves whose spray wet our faces?

After crossing the bridge we followed the road for a short way, and then, leaving our ponies to be taken on to the little fortified post at Lechir, we struck off to the left to look for the wild sheep. After a quarter of an hour's climb we sat down behind a rock and set to work with the

glasses. Mine were a pair of powerful prism binoculars, and Gul Sher's the old-fashioned telescopic binoculars; so, *ceteris paribus*, I with the better instrument should have picked up anything there was to be seen first. Other things, however, were not equal, and it was Gul Sher's grunt and not mine which told the other that something had been seen which deserved examination through the telescope. They were lying, three of them, and all rams, on one of a series of steep ridges of hard clay about three-quarters of a mile from us. Two of them certainly, with black beards and ruffs, were old rams with good heads. But between us lay a very deep and precipitous ravine, which could not be crossed except by dropping down to the road below us or climbing high up; and as it was then three o'clock on a short February day, the stalk had to be put off till the morrow. So the afternoon was spent in watching them.

Of course the talk was of urial. Gul Sher recounted the tale about the herd which swam the Indus near this very spot. To translate the old chap's quaint idioms and descriptions into bald English, or even worse, the Biblical phraseology which writers of the East sometimes put into the mouths of their dark heroes, I will not attempt. The story, however, ran that in his

young days Gul Sher was stalking a herd of urial on a flattish piece of ground opposite where we were now sitting. From some way above he had seen the herd disappear down a steep cliff as if going to water, and had gone down after them; but on arriving at the spot where he expected to get a shot, he saw to his astonishment the last of them emerging from the water on the opposite bank. I suggested that what he saw was in reality a different herd. "That may be, Sahib," said the old man, nodding his head and taking a great pinch of snuff, "but if it was, then there must have been on each bank of the Indus at that moment a herd of exactly the same number, with an identical proportion of rams, and each with one ram that was lame in the same hind leg!"

The belief is common enough in the Gilgit district that in winter urial do swim the Indus, but Gul Sher is the only native of these parts I have met or heard of who could be called in any sense an "eye-witness." The idea is that in early spring they cross from the good winter feeding-ground on the right bank to go to their summer pasturages high above Astor. If the story is true, they must be extraordinarily good swimmers, for even in winter the distance to be crossed would be not less than a couple of hundred

yards, probably more, and the current is always swift.

These beasts are second to none in activity and wariness, and though the ground they are found in is less romantic than that of some of the other game animals of the Himalaya, the day an old ram urial is fairly stalked and shot is one any sportsman can remember with pleasure.

About the time the shadows began to creep along the hillside, a cloud of dust some way above the urial attracted our attention to another herd coming down. Like most mountain game going down to water, their progress was by short rushes at headlong speed; then a sudden halt, and they would become stones. The big rams got up and joined the herd, and they all disappeared into the ravine together. Then we too got up and went on to the edge, on the chance of their having moved down our way; but nothing was in sight, and as it was too late to begin climbing, we scrambled down to the road and so on to camp. My tent was pitched outside the little loopholed fort occupied by some local levies. They were from Ghor, a small Dard community, living in a collection of mud forts perched high above the precipitous rocks which descend sheer into the Indus opposite Lechir. A wonderful country theirs for grapes, and one

the natural beauties of which present an extraordinary contrast to the ugliness and dirt of the inhabitants.

The Lechir fort itself presented an aspect of dreariness it would be hard to match anywhere. The only green things visible were a few young poplars planted by the side of the stream issuing from a narrow rift opposite the fort, and these only seemed to make the desolation of bare mountains, rocks, and sand appear the more desolate. The place, however, was tolerable at this time of year. It is in the summer months, when a hot wind tears up and down, raising the dust in clouds, that the Indus valley really becomes *Jahannam*. Then, in addition to scorching dust-laden winds, the unwilling traveller (for no one would be found there at this season who could possibly avoid it) is tormented by a peculiarly obnoxious pest known as the "Chilas fly." This insect has a detestable way of unostentatiously settling on an exposed part, and driving in so small a poisoned sting that the prick is not felt; but when gone he leaves an intensely irritating blister to remember him by. His operations last till sundown, when his place is taken by the midge bearing the name of "sand-fly," which after his own manner makes sleep impossible. The impression that one has

strayed into the infernal regions is heightened by the sulphurous fumes arising from boiling springs. Enough, however, of these torments, which were not our portion on this occasion.

We started next morning while the stars were blinking, on what turned out to be a long day. After crossing the Lechir stream, we began climbing for a spot above where we had seen the rams disappear, timing ourselves to arrive after the sun had struck the hillside and started the usual upward current of air. After scrambling over a broad mass of rock fragments stretching up in a straight line far above us, we got on to the hard clay slope known as the Lechir slip. It was not steep enough to be difficult, but the danger of falling stones from above made the breadth of the shoot a glacis to be got over as quickly as possible. This slip is the bugbear of the engineer in charge of the Chilas road. All sorts of different alignments have been tried, down by the water and high up; but wherever the road is made, and whatever precautions are taken to maintain it with walls and suchlike, a week is sufficient to see it swept clean away without a trace remaining. Past the slip, we got among a succession of steep ravines—treacherous walking and requiring great care. The ridges were none too good, but the

sides of the *nullahs* being too steep to stand on, had either to be crossed at a run or by the slow and sure way of cutting steps; but one of these giving way would have meant a bad fall. Boulders half embedded in the stiff sandy clay offered footsteps which it was safer to avoid.

It was on similar ground, and close by here, that a good sportsman met his death about a year subsequently to the date of my story. He had shot an urial, and was hurrying towards the fallen beast, when he put his foot on a boulder sticking out of the cliff; it gave way, and he fell a hundred feet or so, fracturing his skull.

Gul Sher was simply marvellous on this sort of ground, as he was also on rocks, taking the bad bits at a run with absolute assurance. His footgear—strips of hide wrapped round the foot and up his leg (a *chaussure* I have never learnt to wear)—gave him, of course, a little advantage over the nails in my Kashmiri sandals. We had to retrace our steps once to find a better road, so it was some time before we spied our urial. They were on a ridge some 500 yards away, in front of and below us, the two rams lying down and the rest of the herd standing round about them. But in half a minute they too lay down. To our disgust, however, just

when the stalk appeared only a matter of a few minutes, we got hung up on bad ground. After some vain attempts to find a road, and against Gul Sher's wishes,—he was for waiting till the urial moved,—I sent the gun-carrier down to try and move them towards us. These tactics, though commonly practised in deer-stalking, are rarely successful with the wild goats and sheep of the Himalaya, and if some really great beast had been in front of us I should probably not have tried them. Moving one's beast is indeed very rarely attempted in the Himalaya. One gets so few shots, and the toil is so much greater than in deer-stalking in Scotland, the issues in fact so much more momentous, that one is loath to take the risk of driving a good animal in the wrong direction. The writer has shot some hundreds of beasts in and beyond the Himalayas, but in only one instance that he remembers was an attempt to bring them to him, instead of his going to them, successful, and that was a stag in Kashmir.

It seemed a long time before we saw the youth we had sent run along the road far below us and then disappear. Our hope was that the herd would, on getting his wind, come straight up the ravine our side the ridge they were on, and so doing would give me a shot. We had

not to wait long. The taint on the wind apparently reached the urial all together, for the whole herd suddenly sprang to their feet and disappeared into the ravine on our side. A few seconds' intense expectation and we hoped to hear the rattle of stones showing they were coming our way. But not a sound. After half a minute we got up and looked about. Then we saw what had happened: a cloud of dust a hundred yards below showed our herd were crossing that way, and had not taken the line we had expected. They were not visible, but on running back to the next ridge we saw them one by one topping a little spur about 150 yards from us. I sat down, elbows on knees, and hoped the big ones had not already gone. No, here they came. Last of all the light-coloured ram with black ruff, which I had marked as a shade bigger than the other. They lolloped up the slope, my bullet sped, and they were gone. Hit or miss? Gul Sher ran down to the spot, and I saw him examining the tracks and then sit down and pull out his glasses. He had evidently spotted the herd. Anxiously I awaited his signal. It came soon enough, and I knew I had missed, and that there was no one to blame but myself.

On our way back, we sat down at intervals with the idea of seeing where the herd had gone;

and it was not long before we discovered them, moving slowly now, but going steadily up the hill two thousand feet and more above us. The foremost of them had nearly reached a shoulder of the mountain, behind which ran a big deep valley, which entered the Indus a mile or so above Lechir; the same ravine, in fact—though a great deal higher up—which had blocked our way the previous evening.

Over the shoulder and into this valley they wandered by ones and twos. Without saying anything, we had both settled that the urial were to be followed. Finally, only two ladies of the herd were left on the ridge to cover the retirement, and these, after scraping themselves comfortable beds with their forefeet, lay down.

Is there anything more aggravating than the inevitable female left on the look-out? and what abuse the poor unconscious beast is made the subject of! How many times, after hours of weary waiting, have we seen her rise to her feet and have congratulated ourselves that at last she will follow the herd out of sight and leave our road open; and how many times has she disappointed us, and we have watched her with exasperating deliberation improve her bed, first with one forefoot and then with the other, and subside on to the ground again! I have had as

stalkers Pathans and Kashmiris, Chitralis and Gilgitis, Ladakis and Kirghis, and queer-garbed devotees of Diana of as many more mountain tribes, but the language of all after some hours of this sort of thing (beginning with the preliminary expectoration on the ground) has a very similar ring about it. For there is no approaching the herd when that vigilant sentry is on guard.

It was not till three o'clock in the afternoon, after more than six hours' watching, that the last animal disappeared into the *nullah* and we were able to go on. Just time, however, if the herd had not gone far, to get a shot before it would be too dark to find our way back. The climbing became easier as we got higher, and in an hour's time we found ourselves crawling up the last few feet to look over the ridge.

A wide valley opened before us. The upper part, clothed with pines and junipers, was deep in snow, which lay in patches as far down as we were lying. Below us the valley was bare of vegetation. Two parallel ridges running down the centre evidently at one time formed the lateral moraine of a glacier and made a sort of secondary ravine into which we could not see. Into this I saw some animals disappear, but not soon enough to make out whether they were our herd or an-

other. There was no time to waste, so we hurried after them, running and glissading down a shale slope which lay conveniently close. After climbing up the first of the two ridges we slowly raised our heads — and as slowly lowered them again and looked at each other. A big ram was lying within five yards of us. I felt almost inclined to poke him in the ribs and see him jump; and for a hundred yards or so the ground was literally covered with urial, lying in every attitude of ovine repose! The wind was luckily in our faces, and we had not been seen; but an attempt to push the muzzle of the rifle over would, to a certainty, have attracted the attention of at least one of those scores of sharp eyes, and have resulted in disastrous failure. So we crept with infinite care over the loose stones with which the slope was covered, seeing in every one of them a potential source of ignominy and defeat, to where a big rock was perched on the ridge some eighty yards from the nearest ram. From behind this we surveyed the herd. A supreme moment, the glory of which was more than tinged with anxiety. Our herd had evidently been joined by another; there were three or four rams quite as good as the one we had originally seen, and it was difficult to say which was the absolute best. I therefore selected

the nearest and easiest—our pale-coloured friend of the morning. He was lying facing down-hill, and I had his back only to aim at,—a shot not to be taken if it can be avoided. I had learnt by bitter experience, however, that an attempt to bring urial to their feet with a whistle only results in a stampede, without a half-second's pause in which to aim.

The rifle was cautiously poked over, the trigger pressed, and with the report the ram sprang to his feet but immediately collapsed.

The herd was off in a cloud of dust with a tremendous clatter of stones. They disappeared behind the next ridge, and almost at once reappeared going up the opposite side of the valley. Said the shikari, looking through his glasses, "Mark the ram last but one of the herd." The distance was still not great, and the ram started to the shot evidently hit, and slowed down; the next shot went high, but before I could get in another he stopped altogether, his legs crumpled up underneath him, and he rolled down the hill.

Evening was coming on and there was no time to be lost, so we quickly *cached* the two rams' bodies and started for camp, taking the direct road down the valley instead of climbing back the way we had come. We soon repented this course, as the ravine presently became a gorge, forming,



A dead urial.

when the stream was in spate, a succession of cataracts. The sides, nearly perpendicular, were of stiff clay and conglomerate, and in these we had to cut many hundreds of steps in the growing dusk. More than once I made up my mind to sleep out under some rock and retrace our steps in the morning; but at every turn and wind in the gorge we hoped the next would bring us into easier ground, so we slowly worked our way down. When at last we emerged on to the stone slopes above the Chilas road—and glad to get there—the stars were shining, and it was ten o'clock before we reached camp, tired but happy.

The rams' heads were brought in next day with the meat. The horns measured 30 and 29 inches, both good heads. In one horn of the bigger of the two a leaden bullet was found deeply embedded—the property, no doubt, of some Ghor shikari. It was situated so low down in the horn that I should think it must have stunned the beast for a time, and the shikari must have felt his luck was indeed out when he saw him up and away again. Let us hope he remembered, as I try to do on such occasions, the saying of the philosopher of Shiraz—

> When fate allots him not his daily bread,
> That day the Tigris fishers toil in vain;
> The fish whose end is not ordained (by fate),
> Will not meet death on land.

Though I have had better days after urial as regards mere *size* and numbers, this day is perhaps *the* one out of many I have spent in quest of this sporting sheep that I look back on with most satisfaction.

Rare is it that fortune gives one a chance of repairing an error so quickly.

THE WILD GOATS AND SHEEP OF DARDISTAN.

THE markhor, finest of all the wild goats, attains his greatest size and spread of horns in the wild country of Dardistan, the extreme north-west corner of the Indian Empire and the loftiest mountain country of the world.

The Himalaya in this part may be divided into zones, with, of course, no very hard-and-fast dividing-line between each. Imagine a traveller starting at the level of the Indus, say at 4000 feet, and following one of its tributary valleys upwards. As far as about the 8000 feet contour he will be in a labyrinth of gorges or deep valleys with treeless precipitous sides. He will see gigantic slopes of talus culminating in rocks and precipices above, and, except for an occasional glimpse of a soaring snow peak, he will know nothing of the glorious alpine country far above him. In summer the air is hot and stifling, and these gorges present a forbidding and inferno-like

aspect. The rivers are tumultuous floods of coloured glacier water, and men, beasts, and birds fly from the heat and insect pests to the upper valleys. In winter all this is changed; the air is cold, the turgid waters have cleared, and streams of crystal cascade down the mountains or have been converted into ribbons of ice, while frost and snow have made a magical transformation in the look of the whole country. This is the winter ground of the markhor, for, having little or no warm under-wool like ibex, they do not remain far above the snow-line.

Passing through this zone, the traveller will enter the forest region extending to about the 10,000 feet level, a beautiful alpine country, but intersected by stupendous precipices and chasms. Above this comes the region of Pamir-like valleys, deep during the hot months in grass and innumerable kinds of wild flowers. The sides of these valleys rise abruptly into rocky "pikes" and ridges or ascend into the regions of perpetual snow, while on all sides glaciers protrude their snouts like dragons.[1]

The big markhor separate from the females and young during the summer, and to escape the attacks of flies seem to select one of two alter-

[1] The appearance of glaciers is often such as to render intelligible the ancient Eastern superstition that they were dragons guarding the treasure of the mountains.

natives. Either they remain comparatively low down in the forest region, where they are most difficult to find and stalk, or they ascend to the bare rocks above the limits of vegetation, whence they only come down in the mornings and evenings to feed. Their habitat is then the same as that of the ibex. I have seen a herd of markhor graze their way through a lot of ibex at this season without either taking the least notice of the other. That day I shot a good specimen of both the wild goats.

It seems probable that of the two alternatives, the high ground is most in favour with the biggest markhor. This is what local shikaris say; but their opinion may have been influenced by the fact that they can find markhor on the mountain-tops, while they are baffled in the forests. At any rate there is no doubt that more than a few gigantic old patriarchs spend their summer in forest-covered *nullahs* like Damot in the Gilgit district or Kesu in Chitral, where in addition to other difficulties the hunter gets hung up on very bad ground.

In Chitral an annual migration of markhor takes place, which shikaris call the *rinj*. After spending their winter very low down, where it is possible in a single day to see a monkey, a bear, and a markhor, the latter beasts, which have been inhabiting the southern end of the

range dividing Chitral and Kafiristan, gradually work their way northwards, eventually crossing over to the high knot of mountains beyond Majam.

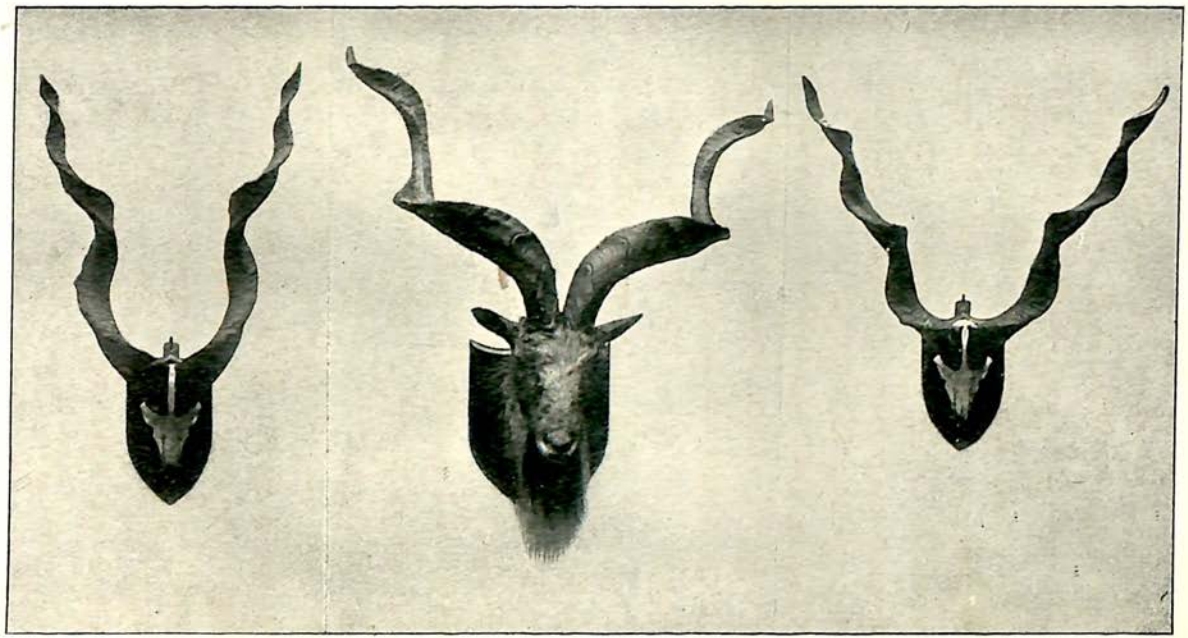
The summer pelage of markhor is of a yellowish white, making them almost as conspicuous in the distance as a flock of sheep. In the winter the coats of the old bucks are of a dark iron-grey, looking in the snow almost black,—a curious reversal of the usual seasonal protective colouring exhibited by other beasts and birds that live much in the snow. As is well known, this peculiarity is shared with them by the European chamois. The strong winter colouring is no doubt connected with the rut and the high living they have enjoyed during the summer. Talking of this function, it is marvellous with what regularity the sexes of this wild goat begin to intermingle on a fixed date in December. During the first part of the month you may search in vain for full-grown males, though females and young may be seen in plenty. In the Gilgit district, it is on the 22nd of December, almost to the day, that the males emerge from the rocks and crannies in which they have been hidden and join the herds. The explanation given by the local people is quaint and picturesque. The farmers of Dardistan have no almanacs, so in order to mark the day on which to begin sowing

their various crops, they erect stone pillars on some prominent sky-line near their village behind which the sun sets. Thus, when the sun sinks exactly behind a certain pillar, they know they should begin to sow barley, and so on with their other crops. The markhor, they say, similarly watch for the sun to set behind some well-known crag; and when this takes place, they know their solitary existence for that year is at an end.

In Chitral, the rutting season, which, it may be mentioned, is the easiest time for stalking, is some ten days earlier. To be in a good markhor glen during the fighting time is a thing to be remembered. One evening I call to mind in the glen of Krui Kandu ("pink almond blossom"), when from all quarters of the precipitous pine-covered hills came the short hoarse cries of invisible combatants. Now and again two rivals would emerge fighting into the open. Rearing up simultaneously, they would come down together, their heads meeting with a crash like two trees being knocked together. Each would manœuvre for the upper ground, and up they would go again, and then crash once more would go those horns, as tough apparently as those made by the Israelitish king to "push" the Assyrians with, the furious combatants being all the time quite regardless of the fact that they were fighting on

the edge of a precipice. Once after a fray like this I picked up half a horn broken off, fresh and bleeding,—and the horns of all markhor at this season are generally much scarred and damaged; but it seems that they subsequently recover a good deal from the rough treatment they have been subjected to, for at other seasons I have shot old beasts that must surely have been the heroes of many hundreds of fights, but with flawless horns.

The rut lasts some twenty days, and the young are born in May,—usually one, sometimes two. The kids are so carefully hidden away by their mothers that they are not often seen. Eagles are said to work havoc among the young of all Himalayan game animals, and my Gilgit shikari used to tell me of a curious ruse based on this fact which is employed to catch the young of markhor. This was for the shikari to get unseen above a female with young. He would then fling a crooked stick over their heads. The kid, he said, taught by instinct, at once dashed for refuge into the nearest cranny as it would at the sight of an eagle, and the shikari would run down and proceed to effect his capture. A young recently caught markhor was once brought to me, and I put her for the night in a room in the Singal post. On going to see it in the morning, my spaniel ran into the room, and the kid jumped



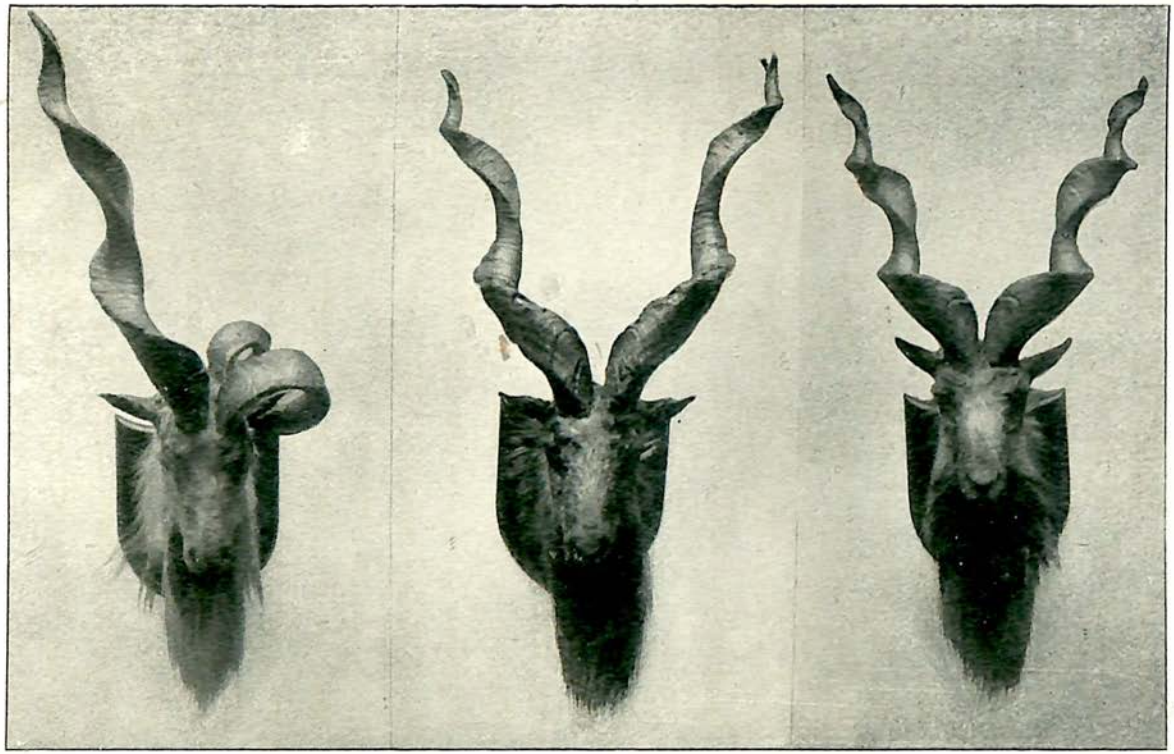
Types of Dardistan markhor.

at one bound through a small square glazed window five feet from the ground and was drowned in the river outside,—a fine bid for freedom that deserved better luck!

The word "markhor" in Persian means "snake-eater"; but no shikari that I ever met imagined that they eat snakes, or indeed ever heard of such a thing, and if any one should know, those should who have had the gralloching of hundreds of them. In Persia no such animal exists, and the name must have been given originally in Afghanistan, or by some of the Persian-speaking invaders of India. To me it seems probable the word was originally *mar-khar*, which would mean snake-donkey—*i.e.*, a donkey with snake-like horns. In Gilgit and Chitral they are not called markhor at all, the natives having different words for the sexes, and again for each sex at the different stages of its life. Though they do not eat snakes, there is a belief in Dardistan that a markhor's skin hung up in a house will prevent snakes from entering. This beast's skin is indeed to the shikari a thing of some value, as after being well smoked and matured it is what he makes his *taotis* from. These are strips of the raw hide wound round the foot and up the leg, and secured by thongs,—an excellent foot-gear for the mountaineer, especially on rock.

Markhor are rather browsers than grazers, the holly oak, which grows in most glens in Gilgit and Chitral, being with them a very favourite shrub. To get at the upper branches of these trees females and kids often climb quite a height from the ground,—and apparently even big markhor too; for once through my spying-glass I saw the branches of a tree violently agitated, and looking closer, lo and behold! a grey-bearded markhor among the branches, that in this undignified position was trying to break them down with his massive horns. Attracted to the spot by vultures, I once came across the dead body of a female hanging suspended by a hind leg from a forked bough some eight feet from the ground. She had evidently ventured too far, and her foot slipping, she had thus miserably perished.

There is no more majestic-looking animal on the hillside than a hoary old markhor with his white beard—not a tuft like ibex, but a mane covering the neck and lower jaw—almost sweeping the ground. Pictures that I have seen never make him shaggy enough. He looks and is the king of wild goats. His head is the finest trophy to be obtained in the Himalaya, the horns varying much in size and shape; so that, added to the fascination of perhaps the highest-class stalking in the world, there is almost a curio-



Types of Dardistan markhor and a freak.

hunter's excitement in securing new trophies, and I verily believe that as much could be written about the vagaries of markhors' horns as has been written on antler lore in Europe. The tendency has been to divide markhor up into all sorts of sub-varieties, based on the different types of horns—Pir Panjal, Astor, Gilgit, Suleiman, and so on. For the sportsman such names are convenient by which to mark the various shapes. For instance, when I recently read in 'The Field' that my friend Captain Barstow had secured the shot record of heads by bagging a "Pir Panjal" markhor carrying horns of 60½ inches in a Gilgit *nullah*, I knew exactly what type of head this magnificent specimen must be, though the description as it stands is of course absurd. The fact is, that in Dardistan are found almost all kinds of heads, varying from the extreme lyrate to the straight type, and it follows that all distinctions based on the supposition that each locality has its own fixed type must vanish. The conclusion that there is only one variety of markhor is further borne out by occasional curly-horned markhor having been seen in Kurram and Baluchistan, districts commonly supposed to produce the straight-horned variety only. In the latter district the markhor is believed to have crossed with the Persian ibex (*Ægragus*), and

it certainly seems as if the latter animal had much more affinity with the markhor than with his namesake the ibex of the Himalaya. Like all the breeds of wild goats and sheep, a markhor's age can be told by the rings on the horn, the growth of which constitutes a rather remarkable phenomenon. It is of course secreted from the base, and the spiral bony core on which it grows being fixed, the horn must slide over it as each segment is added from below, rather like a cork being withdrawn from a corkscrew, so that the tip that at one time is pointing outwards, at another period points inwards.

The ibex is always found very high up, but usually in less precipitous ground than the markhor. He is also a somewhat less difficult beast to shoot. A puff of wind in a wrong direction is fatal to the success of a stalk for either, but the distance from which a human being will be detected is perhaps not so great in the case of ibex as with his shaggy relative.

When other beasts are driven to lower elevations by winter cold and snow, ibex remain at the same height as in summer, or nearly so. This peculiarity has caused a glamour of the supernatural to surround ibex in all the hill countries of the Himalaya. The Ladaki song says—



Ibex country.

In my father's place of hunting the ibex,
Hundreds and thousands of mighty beasts are gathered—
Who can enjoy this spectacle but the *lhas* and *klus*?

The *lhas* are those mysterious deities that live above the clouds and descend only occasionally to the mountain-tops, while the *klus* are water-spirits inhabiting the clouds themselves.

In the winter, ibex are protected by the soft wool which lies under their stiff hair. A beautiful silky homespun is woven from this under-wool, a whole *choga* or cloak being made from the *pashm* found on two to four beasts. But the sportsman who wears a garment of this material will have purchased warmth at the cost of companionship, for his friends will give him a wide berth when he is wearing it!

The rutting season of ibex is a few days later than that of markhor, but ibex shooting at this time should only be undertaken by those who have a very keen appetite for hardships. When the spring arrives, ibex come down to get the first of the new grass, and this is the easiest stalking-time, though they are in terrible condition. The stomach of beasts shot at this season are quite black from their winter diet of juniper. One winter, during the markhor rutting season, I saw a buck ibex for several days running with a herd of the other variety of goat. He used to

pay addresses to the ladies, but when these became too conspicuous, in spite of the fact that ibex are rather heavier beasts than markhor, the old buck of the herd used to drive him off without difficulty. It was evident, too, that his attentions were not acceptable to the females: perhaps they disliked the shape of his horns, for these must mainly be of use in precisely this manner, as distinguishing marks for the preservation of species. There is a story that some females of a herd of tame goats crossed with ibex in the Yasin district, but as *Capra sibirica* is not believed to have anything to do with the ancestry of the domestic breed, the story would require a good deal of confirmation before it could be accepted. It is curious that the horns of all domestic goats in the Himalaya are either scimitar-shaped like ibex or twisted like markhor, but in the former case they have a front keel like the wild goat of Persia and Sind, and in the latter the twist is in the opposite direction to that of the markhor.

It has been said that the early spring is the best time for ibex stalking, but this is also the avalanche season, and great care has to be taken. In some glens, for a few days in the year, the thunder of near and distant avalanches is almost incessant. Ibex at this season fully appreciate the risk, and they assemble for safety on the

ridges; but the sight of an ibex horn sticking out of an avalanche of snow is not very uncommon.

After the green grass has spread up the mountain-side, as it quickly does, ibex are more difficult to find; but the summer climate of ibex-land, the tonic of the air, and general surroundings, make ibex stalking at this season the pleasantest sport of any in the Himalaya. At this time the under-wool comes out in patches, making them look like children's toys with the stuffing coming out. The colour of ibex varies a good deal, the usual changes being from red in the summer to brown in the winter. The males have often a donkey stripe and light saddle-mark, and in winter especially their hindquarters and legs have a good deal of white. Their eyes are goats' eyes—not blue as some taxidermists seem to think. In the summer during the day they lie chewing the cud on rocky crags and aguilles, whence they only come down in the evenings, often too late for a shot, so the stalker has to be up betimes.

Luckily for the ibex and markhor stalker there is some reliance to be placed on the wind, "the fickle element" in these parts. Before the sun is up the wind blows downwards, and an early stalk may sometimes be made from below, but as

soon as the sun strikes the hillside, if the sky is clear one may count on the wind setting upwards: the game has then, of course, to be approached from above. This general rule has exceptions of course; for instance, a big mass of snow or glacier often causes a local downward current. In Tibet and the Pamirs the wind is proverbially treacherous, and on stormy days everywhere in the Himalaya successful stalks are the exception, though good approaches have been made under cover of a passing cloud. A storm in the summer sends ibex straight down to lower altitudes, as their coats are then thin.

Though a very powerful animal, an ibex collapses sooner to a bullet than most other mountain game. When wounded, he will sometimes employ his horns for purposes of defence, but it is needless to say that the old travellers' tale of the use ibex make of their horns as a sort of buffer to alight on when throwing themselves down precipices is a myth. The story has, however, *some* foundation, for I have seen an ibex that was going too fast down a hard snow slope put the brake on by digging a horn sideways into the snow.

A remarkable but not very uncommon attitude in ibex that I have never seen mentioned is sitting up on their haunches like a dog, which gives them a very comical appearance. I must admit I have

only seen it adopted by the young, and presumably the frivolous of a herd.

The horns of this wild goat are set on at all sorts of angles, those forming an open V when seen from the front being the handsomest. The biggest Dardistan horns often curve in an outward spiral like the gigantic heads lately brought from the Thian Shan range. Some, on the other hand, have tips that converge, and I have myself shot one with horns of 43 inches, the tips of which were only 3½ inches apart. The tips of the horns of a very big *Ægragus* that I shot in Persia actually crossed, and the 'Encyclopedia of Sport' mentions one of the breed under notice with the same ugly peculiarity. As to colour, both in the north of Gilgit and Chitral one comes across what seems almost like a distinct variety of ibex with very massive pale-coloured horns. Shikaris say that these are visitors from Badakshan and Wakhan, but I do not myself think there are any grounds for believing that the northern and southern slopes of the same range are inhabited by different varieties of ibex. At the same time, the difference between these pale massive horns and the more usual dark thin ones is very curious. The very thin horns one sometimes comes across are, according to shikaris, found on ibex born two at a time. As with

hawks, so with ibex,—there are what people of these parts call "arghuns"—*i.e.*, white ones—but these are really nothing more than old ibex whose coats have grown grey with years.

Though urial (or oorial) is the accepted appellation of *Ovis vigni* among sportsmen, it is only in a small part of the Punjab that this is his local name. In Ladak he is the *Sha*, in Astor the *Oorin*, in Chitral the *Warkalu*, in Baluchistan the *Gadh*, in Persia the *Ghuch*, and there are at least as many more names for him in the vernaculars of other parts, for the range of country he inhabits is very wide. In Ladak he has been known to cross with the *Ovis ammon;* north of Chitral he is found in the drainage area of the Oxus, and it may consequently be surmised that his habitat extends nearly up to that of Polo's sheep; in Baluchistan and Eastern Persia he is found on practically every mountain-range. Some heads I recently shot near the south-east corner of the Caspian belong to the same race of wild sheep; and it will probably be acknowledged later on that Gmelin's sheep, found in Western Persia and Asia Minor, and the European *mouflon* are but local varieties of the one great race. It has been said that the *Ovis Gmelini* must be classed apart from the urial, from the fact that the horns of the former curve inwards,

tending to meet behind the neck; but the distinction cannot really hold good, for I have myself shot urial with this inward twist in the Gilgit district. The fact is, that all the local varieties of this big breed have their own characteristics,—horns long and short, with bold frontal angles and of round section, thick and thin, deeply corrugated and smooth. The pelage also varies, most markedly so in the ruffs carried by old rams, which in Dardistan are black, while at the other extreme, those of the Kopet Dagh rams are snowy white.

The ground urial live on in Dardistan is generally less rocky and more open than that the wild goats are found on. They love the sandy plains or straths covered with *zhun*, an aromatic wormwood which, from a distance, might be taken for heather. Steep clay cliffs and precipitous ravines form their retreat in the daytime, and a remarkably effective one, as in such ground, when lying still, they are almost invisible — turned, in fact, into stones. They are, consequently, very difficult to pick up; but this is true of all mountain game, except when on the snow or on very open ground. When in pursuit of all these beasts, the expanse of ground that can be spied is usually very great, so that the most careful and minute examination

is necessary—irritatingly so sometimes—to avoid passing beasts over. No "sweeping the horizon" after the manner of a sea captain! As a shikari truly remarked to the writer, "Every minute you spend with the glass to your eye is 'worth while.'"

Urial have not the *pashm* or under-wool that is so remarkable among beasts that live in very cold altitudes, and they are in consequence never found much above snow-level; or perhaps, to be more accurate, the latter should be classed as cause and the former as effect. Heavy snowfall drives them low down, and I have been shown a spot on the Gilgit plain to which a few years previously a big herd had descended in this way. There they were surrounded by men and dogs, and the whole herd mobbed to death. Judging, however, from the numbers found in these parts, this must have been a very unusual windfall for the hungry Gilgitis. Now game laws, in the framing and passing of which the writer is glad to think he was closely connected, make such a massacre impossible. The large number of urial in this district is also explained by the fact that these beasts leave the shikaris' hounds standing, and absolutely refuse to be brought to bay in precipices, like ibex and markhor.

Like burhel, urial are very restless beasts,



Every minute with the glass is worth while.



A shikari.

constantly shifting their ground, so that it is not an uncommon thing for the sportsman, when in the middle of a carefully conceived stalk, to come face to face with his herd where he least expected it, usually with disastrous results. On the other hand, the instinct of putting out a sentry is less marked with the sheep than with the goats. One good feature about urial shooting is that the ground is rarely so *big* and dangerous that a local man is a necessity as a guide among the precipices, for after all there is a great charm in running one's stalk.

The gestation period in the sheep is longer than that of the goats, the rutting season of urial in the Dard country being in November and the young being born in May. Generally urial mutton is excellent in spite of their strongly scented food, especially if the beasts are young. Their skins are valueless even to the Dard, who can turn most things to some account, and so one commonly finds them used as prayer-mats. The secretion from the eye-pit is believed by shikaris to be an excellent salve for the human eye, while that from the groin forms, to say the least, an odd sort of perfume! Like all the sheep, urial can carry a lot of lead, and a badly placed bullet will as a rule cause the sportsman much expenditure of energy. It is

fortunate, however, that this sporting beast is not without some weaknesses. He is often caught during his midday siesta, and if a stalk is foozled, he will occasionally give one a second chance—a thing that the wild goats never do.

CACCABIS CHAKOR.

THE Himalayan red-legged partridge is a much misunderstood bird. Too often is it the case that his pursuit, instead of being a delightful sport, exhilarating to body and soul, results only in physical dishevelment, and a state of mind which can only be compared to the blackness which sometimes falls on a golfer when struggling with adverse fate. It is often worse, for whereas the most unfortunate golfer's ball does not always lie in a bunker or in "a hole with a lump behind," the sportsman who goes about chakor shooting in any but the right way is always fighting against overwhelming odds. Let us, however, perching ourselves on some pinnacle of the mighty Hindu Kush, watch — up to a certain point at least — the adventures of one unversed in the wiles of the bird. The scene is in one of the wide sterile valleys in the Gilgit district, where scree and boulder-covered slopes, cut up by numerous deep ravines, rear themselves up into great snow-capped mountains. Here and there ribs of

rock crop out of the tumbled mass of loose stones. The bottom of the valley is terraced for cultivation, and to one side stands a village, half concealed in an orchard of bare mulberry and apricot trees. The prevailing colour below the snow is *kharki*, for the blue river has cut for itself a deep gorge in the alluvium, and runs out of sight at the bottom of perpendicular cliffs. During the night the chakor have come down into the bare fields, and long before light their shrill, gamey call is echoing over the valley. Our sportsman, who, let us assume, is a glutton at hard work, is on the spot at dawn, with his man behind him carrying his cartridges. The fields are bare as the palm of his hand, and as he tops the stone wall bounding the village cultivation he sees a large covey of chakor scuttling along underneath a terrace wall not a hundred yards ahead of him. As they drop down into the next field out of sight, he walks quickly forward, hoping to approach the birds unseen and flush them; but as he does so, they one by one flutter up on to the next terrace, and race across at an incredible pace towards the hill. Doubling back, our sportsman breaks into a trot to cut them off, having to surmount the six-foot walls of several terraces *en route*. He partially succeeds, and the birds get up,—not quite where he expected (they never do that!),

but some distance to one side of where he approached the sunk fence, giving him a long shot. One bird, however, drops, and another, wounded, brings up the tail of the covey as they wheel round and pitch among the rocks, about where the fields end and the hill slopes begin. At the double report another cunning old cock gets up from under his feet, and goes away without being shot at.

The report has had the effect of disturbing two more lots of birds, and he marks them down also among the rocks away to the left, and from the clamour that arises from the hillside the stones must be full of them. Our sportsman, however, follows the first covey, and soon arrives among the *débris* of broken rocks where he had marked them. There they are, fifty yards ahead now, fat grey little chaps, jumping from rock to rock up the hillside. "They can't go fast on this ground, and if that fifty yards can be reduced by twenty, I ought to put them up and get a brace." Never was a more grievous error made. After ten minutes' frantic climbing, tumbling, and slipping over the loose rocks, he finds himself half-cooked, with the chakor, fresh as ever, retaining their lead. He now bethinks himself of strategy, or, we will rather say, tactics, for his strategy is wrong from the start. A small dry

ravine offering concealment, he climbs up this at a more moderate pace. Emerging where, to his own futile imagination, he must be well ahead of the chakor, he advances cautiously, expecting at every step to flush them. Suddenly a shrill chorus bursts out from above him. Turning sharply round, he sees the last of the covey flutter up a rock face far above him, and well out of shot. The rest are on the top of the rock, little moving shapes against the sky. He can almost see their open mouths as they shout forth their scorn. Then, for the first time, an exclamation leaves his lips!

Our sportsman now turns his attention to one of the other coveys, and the next thing that happens as he makes his way slowly along the steep hillside—gun in one hand and helping himself along the floor with the other, one eye on the ground and the other on the look-out—is that they have got up below him, and, before he can put his gun to his shoulder, have swung round out of shot. He watches them take a long flight and go down below a shoulder of rock. Arrived at its foot, he is in time to see the chakor disappearing over the crest, and the now heated sportsman scrambles after them. At the top the chakor are not visible, but a deep ravine opens before him from which come more chakor

voices, loud and clear. So he proceeds along the edge of the ravine, keeping a sharp look-out, his attendant heaving stones down the sides. Suddenly, *whirr, whirr*, a big covey rise up from under his feet and dive down into the gorge behind him. Trying to swing round, he nearly loses his balance on the sharp slippery rocks, but manages to loose off one barrel at the birds—an obvious, hopeless miss. And after this manner the day wears on. As the sun gets hot on the hillside, the birds move higher up and get more scattered, but not by any means less wary or difficult to approach. The efforts our sportsman makes are nothing less than heroic, but when for the nth time he finds himself beaten by the birds in a race uphill, a savage longing for a four-bore duck-gun comes over him with which to let drive into the brown at eighty yards. Legs and lungs, he finds, have their limitations, and he also discovers, much to his disgust, that with heart going 200 to the minute his skill with the gun has departed; and when at length a stalk is successful, his efforts are rewarded by misses. His temper has in the meantime sadly deteriorated, hence his expressive language about the birds, in which, as the Persians say, "he omits nothing of a dishonouring character." Over his return, however, we will draw a kindly veil.

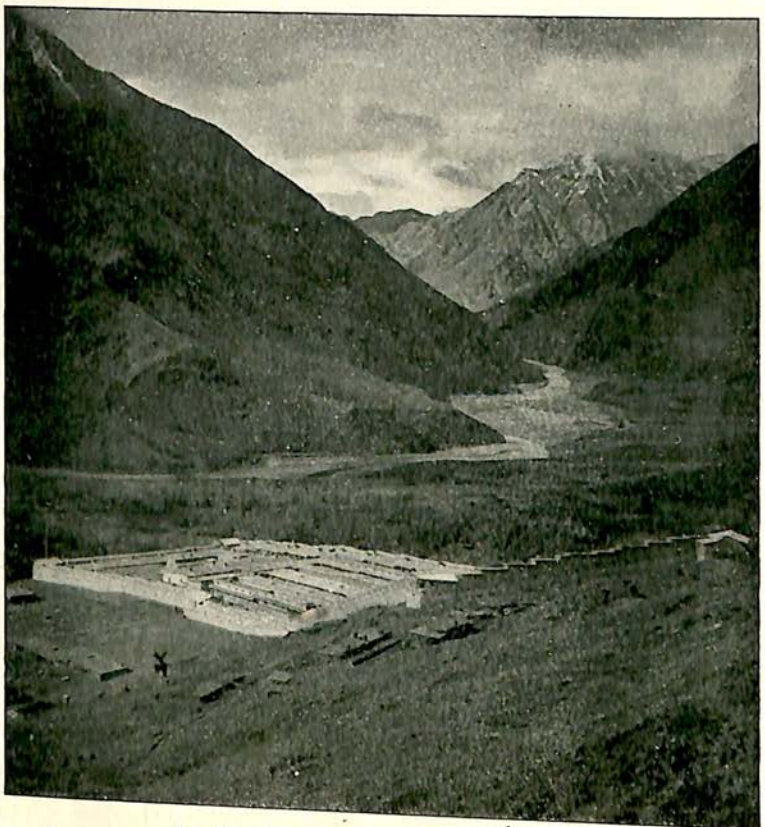
Now let us turn to the other side of the shield and see if there are not some points in the character of *Caccabis chakor* to redeem him from being labelled *turpissimus*. The same qualities that make the chakor anathema to people who would walk him up, render him a really high-class bird for driving; for though his very tough pair of legs enable him to run uphill at a pace which defies the human biped, he has a rooted objection to running downhill, in which respect he resembles the mountain hare. Talking of this quadruped, I was one day walking with my gun, accompanied by a very diminutive specimen of the Himalayan boy with my cartridges, when we happened to put up a hare, which ran a couple of hundred yards uphill and then sat up looking at us. I was starting to walk after him when I was stopped by my youthful companion, who wanted to make a detour and come down on the top side of him. Seeing hesitation in my eye, he looked at me with wonder. "Don't you know," he said, "that a hare has a very long pair of legs behind and a very short pair in front, and that if you come on him from below he'll run away, whereas if you come on him from the top he won't know which way to run and you will shoot him?" It is somewhat the same with our chakor; but in his case, though he will not run, he has no

objection to flying downhill, or even on the level along the contours of the hills, and after he has got under way, the pace he acquires is an eye-opener, especially when he is on the downward slope.

In Chitral, which is a great country for falconry, the art of driving chakor has been reduced to a science. Chakor remain high up in the mountains during the summer, where the markhor or ibex stalker sometimes puts them up in great packs, or meets them coming round the corners like a whirlwind, uttering their peculiar cry, "Whichoo-whichoo-whichoo!" which is quite different from their call or cackle. But in winter, when the upper country is deep under snow, they are driven into the lower valleys, and are attracted to the neighbourhood of the villages by the seed in the ground. There are few places in Chitral where there are not the well-known cut-and-dried drives, which are managed now in precisely the same way they have been for hundreds of years past, and in which every man and boy knows his own place. Of course in this country none of it is done on the level as it is at home, for though some slopes are steeper than others, such a thing as a level space much bigger than a tennis-court scarcely exists. So chakor-driving usually means sweeping the birds along the side of a valley in

the downward direction, or, if the valley is sufficiently narrow, both sides are taken at once.

The usual formation for the beaters is that of a horse-shoe when two sides of a valley are taken, or a half horse-shoe for one side. The flankers proceed straight up the hillside in single file before the drive begins, and after climbing up a certain height so as to be well above the birds, turn at right angles and station themselves at intervals right up to the guns. Their duties are to act as stops and prevent the birds running up, and these they carry out by keeping up a continual cannonade of stones down the hillside (often pleasant for the beaters!), not to speak of yells; in fact, they do anything that occurs to them both to keep the birds in the drive and to prevent them pitching among the screes or on bluffs of the hillside. After his first or second flight, a chakor sits very tight when he gets among rocks and boulders, and is often passed over. Often too, when put up a second time, they fly back over the beaters' heads, and when they once start in the wrong direction nothing on earth the beaters can say or do will stop them. As for the guns, needless to say there are no butts, and they have to take their chance in the open, or behind bushes or boulders as fate may decree; and if a level square yard or even less offers on which one can

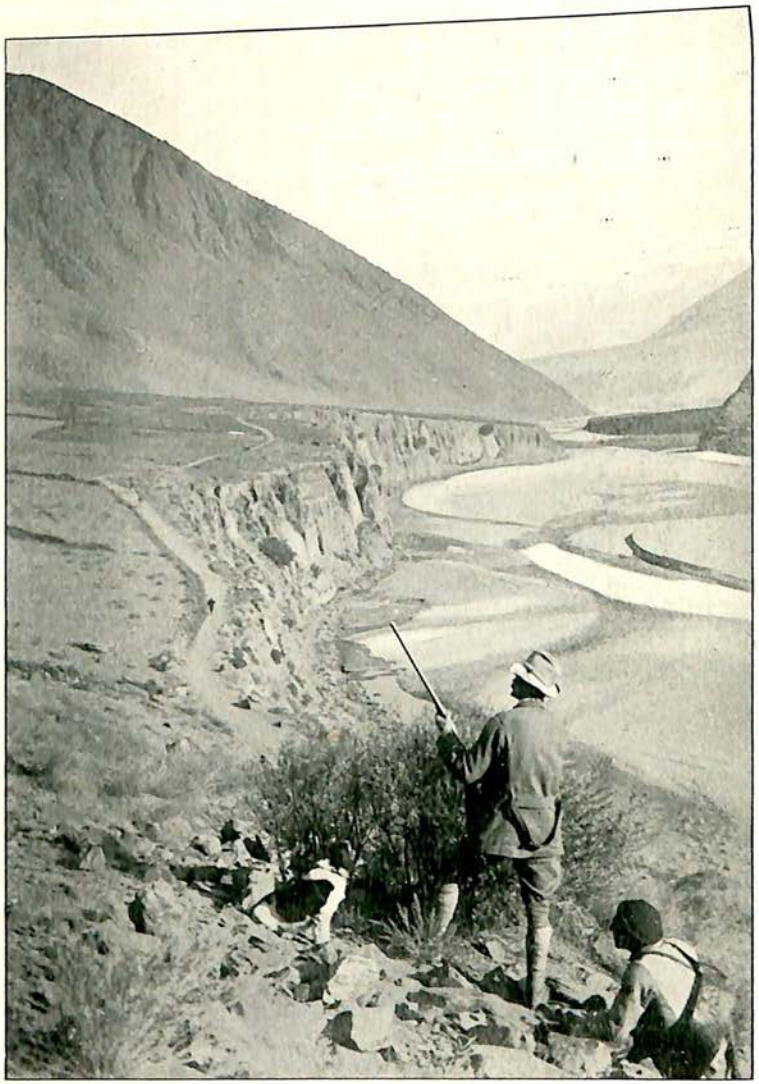


Drosh, showing some gooa chakor ground.

stand and be able to twist round without upsetting, one is in luck's way. Naturally, the line is placed where the valley narrows; frequently also in front of a rib of rock or bluff, or on a ridge of boulders, all of which are places chakor fly to, and from which it is difficult to dislodge them. In number the guns should be as a rule from three to seven or eight; but in this remote country, except at Drosh, where there is a Goorkha regiment stationed, it is as a rule difficult to get even two guns. Often in Chitral itself, where the people, as has been mentioned, are great falconers, in the place of other guns a few of the local "nobility" make up a party and throw off their hawks at the driven birds, for in Chitral falcons are trained not to be gun-shy.

Let me, however, try to describe a typical drive. Breakfast has been eaten by candle-light, and by 7 A.M. the guns are climbing into their places. The early rising which chakor-shooting demands is not its most delightful part, but it is a necessity, for after eleven, unless the birds are kept very low down by deep snow, they are scattered all over the hillsides and nothing can be done with them. The scene is a fan of cultivated terraces facing the Chitral river at the embouchure of a glen. Above the cultivation are steep hillsides covered with coarse grass and wormwood and littered with

rock-pieces, and this is the ground to be driven. At the farther end of this ground a high ridge of black rock forms a shoulder running down into the river, where a deep pool of green water circles round and round. The two guns take their stand, one a hundred yards or so above the other, on a ridge in front of the bluff, for the chakor, it is known, will make straight for this. The sportsman whose fortune we will follow has drawn the upper stand, and behind a convenient bush, together with his cartridge-carrier and a retrieving spaniel, is preparing a flat place for his feet, when the leading men belonging to the line of stops appear on the sky-line above him. Word is passed by them to begin, and the wind soon brings faintly the chakor-beaters' cry, "Ho! ho! ho! ho!" repeated quickly in a monotone. A hundred paces or so in front are some steep rocks on which the upper gun fixes his eyes, for the birds will either come over these or swing round below. The lower gun has some shooting first, for he gets the chakor which are put up from the terraces. But soon the other gets to work. First a covey very high up tempts him to waste a couple of cartridges on birds out of shot. Then a straggler from the same covey, at a slightly lower elevation, is touched, and wheels round and flies straight across the river to the slopes, half a mile dis-



The lower gun.

tant on the opposite bank. Then a bird comes stealing like a shadow round the rocks on a level with his head. He misjudges the pace. The chakor is past like a flash, is missed with the right barrel, but knocked over behind the line with the left. Each bird that is put up is signalled by the beaters by loud cries of "Hai-e-e-e!" which are taken up by the stops and mingle with the roar of dislodged stones. And when this cry comes down wind even the spaniel, already shivering with excitement, can scarce restrain a whimper, for he knows its meaning as well as anybody. As the birds cross below the stops, the latter wave their garments round their heads as well as shout, as no one but hillmen can, in order to keep the birds down; and running this gauntlet of fearful sights and sounds, what wonder that the driven birds waste no time on the road towards supposed safety among the cliffs! And now for a minute he can scarcely load and fire fast enough. Some birds shoot across the sky at all heights; some straight at his head with motionless wings outstretched, only balancing from side to side. Some glide close to the ground along the hillside below him, but all are travelling at the pace which makes a driven chakor perhaps the hardest bird to kill that flies. And in saying this I am not merely doing so

for the sake of effect. The chakor is, in the first place, a really wild bird. He is practically the same bird as the French partridge, but bigger, averaging perhaps 2 oz. heavier. (I have weighed one of 25 oz.) According to all theory, therefore, he should fly faster. His efforts are, moreover, generally accelerated by gravity, and on the downward slope his pace is enormously increased, the variation on the level and downhill being extremely puzzling. And a last point in his favour, and against the man that holds the gun, is that he is most difficult to see against the hillsides, for it is rarely among mountains which seem to meet the cloud that one views him against the sky, except when straight overhead. Chitralis are particularly sharp at seeing birds coming; but when the cry of "Hai-e-e-e!" makes both the gun and his cartridge-carrier look till their eyes almost drop out, even the latter sometimes misses seeing a bird till behind them, and his gasp of "Below you, sir!" comes too late.

The birds now come with longer intervals between, and the beaters are drawing near. A covey that has pitched in the rocks just in front are put up one by one, and afford some easier shooting. The stops descend, and the drive is at an end. The Chitralis, picturesque-looking ruffians in loose robes tied in at the waist, and

long half-tanned boots of red leather, are scattered about picking up birds. One man is sent down to fish up a chakor which towered and fell plump into the green pool 400 feet below us, while the spaniel is taken to find a runner which pitched below the bluff. The bag? Well, if the drive is a good one and the shooting moderate, five to ten brace is a good pick-up for one gun. But I have known seventy cartridges fired at a single stand by an average shot at other game for seven birds, and, *horresco referens*, I have also heard a voice exclaim—"No, I didn't kill any, but, thank goodness, I hurt a few!" The best bag of driven chakor I have ever participated in was fifty-six and a half brace in the day; but this was the result of about half a dozen drives, which is rarely possible, as I have already said. Apart from the intrinsic difficulty, one of the great charms of shooting driven chakor is the variety of shots one gets; for instance, birds below one, which one gets in no other sort of shooting except perhaps at rock-pigeons from a cliff. A great number of the shots are long ones, and if one were to select a gun for the special purpose, it would be made to shoot one and a quarter of No. 5 shot. Smaller shot than this often means a number of runners, which among rocks and boulders are frequently lost altogether, for on this sort of

ground they leave very little scent. And one wants good cartridges too. One strong lot of cartridges I used in a gun that was not so tight in the action as when it left its maker, used to leave some fouling in the breech. "There are cartridges if you like," said my Chitrali servant when cleaning the gun one day in genuine admiration. "They not only shoot out of the muzzle, but out of the breech too!"

The sporting Chitralis, though they prefer their hawks, appreciate good shooting. A remark once made to the writer after a high bird had been crumpled up was, "Ah, Sahib, what sport! what shooting! Before the English came, the height of skill was to bring a dove down plump from the top of a high tree!" In justice to the Chitralis, however, it must be said that when they do use a gun it is the native match- or flint-lock with a small round bullet, so it is evident that the feat of bringing a dove down from the top of a high tree did not at all deserve the contempt with which the flattering Oriental spoke of it.

One of the best drives near Chitral, and a very characteristic one, is that near a village called Ayun. It was a famous drive for hawking in the days of the old kings, and as the manner of it is peculiar, some description may be given.

The river (which is here unfordable and has no bridge) flows below a cirque of black cliffs some 300 or 400 feet high. Down the centre of the cliffs, and across the beach to the water's edge, runs a sort of mole formed of enormous boulders and fragments of rock. During the drive the cliffs are crowned by men, but the ground which is actually driven lies on the opposite side of the river, the terraced fields of another large village. The chakor, driven off these, fly across the river to the cliffs, but are kept on the move by men employed in rolling stones over the edge; and so the birds fly backwards and forwards over the gun on the mole till they gradually find their way out of the trap. Let us imagine the guns have taken their places. A puff of smoke from the top of the cliff and the report of a matchlock is the sign for the beaters to begin. The long horse-shoe line of black dots on the opposite bank gradually works in, and as the line approaches a roar of stones begins from the cliffs above, and this continues the whole time. "Hai-e-e-e!" come the warnings from beyond the river, from above, behind, and every direction. The gun on the mole keeps spinning round, first taking a shot this way and then that, as fast as he can. From the cliffs the rocks come crashing down with enormous

bounds into the river, throwing up columns of spray and leaving clouds of dust in their track. To keep the birds moving, matchlocks are continually fired off by the men crowning the cliffs above, and also by the beaters on the other side; and what with these and the guns on the mole, and the shouting, the thunder of rocks, and every sound echoed backwards and forwards from rock to rock, one might imagine a terrific engagement taking place. The excitement and noise go on increasing till in ten minutes a climax is reached and it subsides again.

The same drive can be done several times in a season. There was one drive conveniently near Chitral which my Chitrali orderly used continually to propose till I had to protest. "Why, we only did that one last week for the third time." "What matter?" he replied. "The birds will certainly be there. *These chakor*," he added, "*have no shame.*"

Though driving would nearly always be a better way of killing chakor than by walking them up, it must not be supposed that the latter plan is never successful. For instance, in Kashmir, where the mountain-sides are covered with low scrub, in which birds lie, a line of guns can have capital fun. Many is the sportsman at home who looks back with longing and regret on delightful days

spent in tramping the steep green hills of Kunmu or Chashma Shahi, where the exquisite beauty of the scenery, the lake shimmering below, the purple mountains around, and all the glamour and tender colouring found nowhere but in the "happy valley," would make him declare himself careless whether the chakor were lying well or not. Still, my friend, when a bird, put up by the line far above you, shot straight down over the guns, and Bang! bang! bang! came down the line, and he was still going unscathed at eighty miles an hour when he arrived above *your* head, and you did remember to hold an almost incredible distance in front, and your inspiration was rewarded by seeing him crumple up into a ball of feathers and fall stone-dead 150 yards below you,—when all this did happen, I say, then for the moment the beauties of the country of Lalla Rookh retired into the background of sublimial consciousness, and *Caccabis chakor* became the finest bird "that ever did fly."

A VANISHING SPORT.

It is only in a few of the remotest recesses of the rugged Hindu Kush that the old sport of driving with hounds still lingers, and this mostly in glens where the foot of few white men have trod. In other places the arrival of the Englishman has been followed by game-laws, the necessary concomitant of modern rifles. These all condemn driving, and rightly, for the man with the weapons of to-day stands in no need of four-footed assistants to make things easier for him. It is otherwise with the indigenous sportsman armed with his old matchlock of prehistoric design. With the crude weapons carried by Chitrali or Washigam shikaris, not all the hunter's craft at their disposal, nor the ownership of the best breeds of hounds, would enable them to exterminate game.

The theory of the sport is based upon the fact that markhor and ibex, when escaping from their natural foes, leopards and wolves, fly to precipices



The remotest recesses of the rugged Hindu Kush.

where no other animal, be he cat or dog, can venture, and when followed by the hunter's hounds they pursue exactly the same tactics. Arrived at their supposed refuge, they are so intent on staring at the baying hounds that they pay little attention to their deadlier two-footed foes, who can approach close enough to use their antiquated pieces with effect. It is said that whole herds are sometimes wiped out in this way; but this must be very rare, or one would not find all grounds new to the European sportsman as full of game as they usually are.

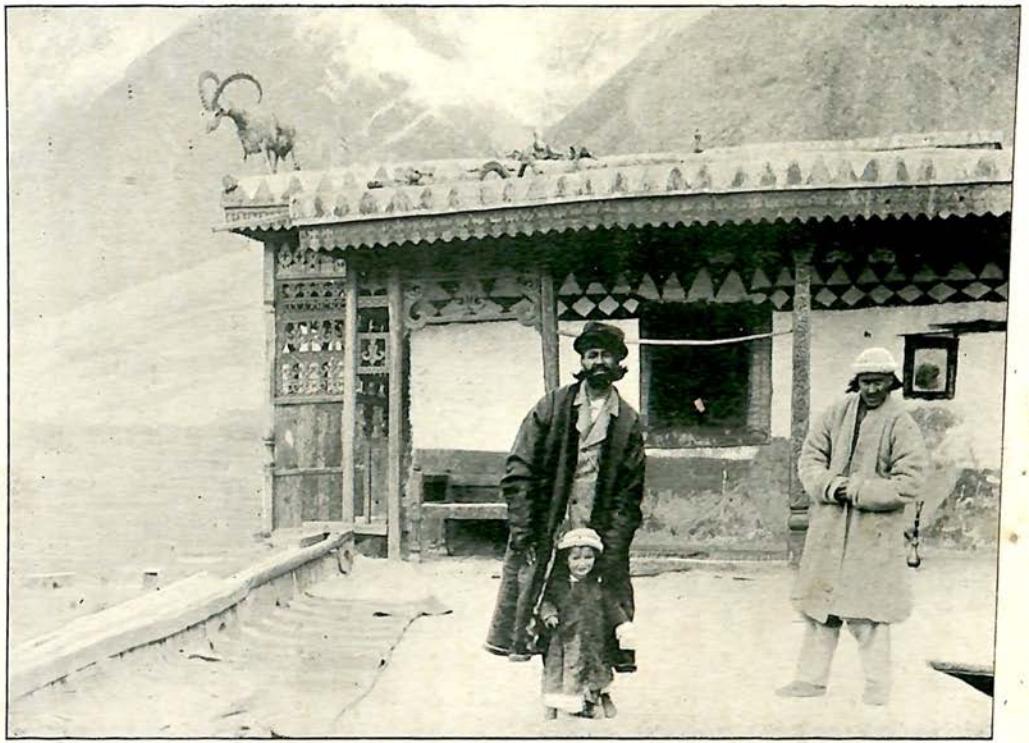
The sport is conducted in two ways. There is the royal drive, as managed for the benefit of the petty kings of the Hindu Kush, in which a large number of beaters with dogs drive the game up to posted guns, much as chamois are driven in Austria. And there is the humbler but more sporting way followed by the professional hunter, with his leash of hounds, frequently entailing toil which few but born mountaineers could endure. One's pity, however, is reserved for the princes and mighty ones of the earth in this matter, for here, as in other places, they are rarely allowed the pleasure of doing their own hunting. Poor kings who miss the real enjoyment of sport, though themselves ignorant of their loss, one cannot but feel sorry for them!

Let me first try to describe a royal drive as arranged for the Mehtar of Chitral, the premier chieftain of the Hindu Kush.

Early one winter morning I found myself following a Chitrali guide up a gorge where sheer sides of rock in places almost met above us. Every few hundred yards the torrent impinged against one rock wall or the other, necessitating a crossing by means of a pine pole flung across the foaming water. The night's frost had glazed such of these as were touched by the spray with a film of ice, which had to be dusted with sand before even my light-footed guide could trust himself on them. But for these—and occasional anxious moments at points where a crossing of the stream had been deemed unnecessary in local opinion, and we had to creep gingerly round difficult rock corners where the water below roared a most uninviting summons—the tract was monotonous enough, as one could see but a short way in front owing to the turns of the gorge.

The "king," whose shooting-box lay some way up the valley, had gone up the previous evening by a zigzag path over the mountain, along which (on a Chitrali pony) it was possible to ride.

The valley, which, like most others in this part of the Himalaya, was a gorge for a few miles above its embouchure into the main Chitral glen, pres-



A petty king of the Hindu Kush.

ently opened out, and the shooting-box came in sight, a little wooden structure built on a plateau overhanging the stream and surrounded by pines and junipers. A crowd of retainers was lounging about outside, a picturesque crew of good-looking ruffians carrying all kinds of arms, from matchlock to Mannlicher, and like all Chitrali crowds, full of jokes and laughter. The shikaris and beaters had all been out since long before daylight. It was now about nine o'clock, and so far no news had come. The Mehtar came out to meet me, a pale young man rather below middle height with a quiet dignified manner, the difficulties of whose position it is unnecessary to dilate on here. Having not yet breakfasted he asked me to join him, an invitation I found no difficulty in accepting, as the keen morning air had long since made my early breakfast a mere remembrance. It fortunately proved to be not the Oriental repast of ceremony, but a comparatively light meal, consisting of but four enormous dishes or rather trays of *pillaus* and suchlike, from which the "king" and I ate direct without the unnecessary formality of separate plates. He ate delicately with his fingers, as the Easterns say "with discretion," while I had the use of the only spoon and fork.

As to the prospects of sport, I learnt that a herd of markhor had been seen on the previous evening

with one big buck, and the shikaris, with some two hundred beaters and the royal pack, had gone out to surround them on three sides for the purpose of driving them towards the hunting-ground. Breakfast over, our hands were sprinkled with rose-scented water from a big brass *aftaba*, and we set off on foot. We soon began to climb up a path newly cut in the steep hillside, and in half an hour found ourselves on a little platform with a low wall in front, some four hundred feet above the stream. Looking across, the opposite slopes deep in snow were visible to a height of two or three thousand feet above us; they were not excessively steep, and were scantily covered with junipers and holly oaks. Immediately opposite us, at a range of perhaps ninety yards, was a precipitous face of rock going down almost sheer into the water. This was the point to which the markhor were to be driven, and where it was hoped they would stand long enough to be shot.

We had now to keep as still and silent as possible, and sat ourselves down behind the wall at points from which we could get a commanding view. An attendant flung over the Mehtar a magnificent fur robe which had come from Bokhara, and others wrapped themselves in sheepskin pelisses and cloaks, for the wind was bitterly cold. Only a few of the Mehtar's

intimates had accompanied us to the butt; but in glancing at the array of modern rifles with which they were armed, and at the rocks opposite where the beasts were to be shot down, I half regretted coming to what seemed likely to end in a butchery, for the combination of ancient strategy with modern arms seemed a trifle unfair to our quarry.

The Mehtar was beguiling the time by telling me of some wonderful battues at this spot, in the time of his ill-fated predecessor, when faint, confused sounds of shouting came from high up the opposite mountain, mingled with the yelping of dogs. Presently some black dots appeared moving far away in the snow; then a man perched up on a rock behind us said, "Big markhor coming this way," and we saw a beast come bounding down alone, pausing after each spring to see where the danger lay, and heading straight for the rock face opposite. The men in the butt all seized their rifles and crouched close to the wall. I declined the Mehtar's pressing invitation to take the shot, so he got ready. The markhor was now within two hundred yards of us, and I was watching him through the glasses. A kingly fellow he looked, with his head thrown back, his great black spiral horns standing grandly out, and his long beard sweeping the

snow. Suddenly, seeming to scent danger in front, he turned half left and up the glen. A few gigantic bounds brought him, with an avalanche of snow and stones, to the bottom of the valley, across which he dashed and was lost to view. Two or three shots had been fired as soon as it was seen he was not going into the rock face, but he was not touched; and I was glad to think he might live to add a few more inches to his magnificent spread of horns, enjoy a few more seasons of courtship, and then die in a more befitting manner.

Of course the grumbles in the butt were loud and not less sincere, and every one blamed every one else for having moved or showed themselves at the critical moment. The big markhor of the herd had escaped, and it now became apparent also, from the shouts and yelps getting fainter and fainter, that the rest of the herd had somehow managed to break through the line.

But stay, here comes something down the opposite slope. It is a doe markhor, going as if a pack of demons were after her. On she comes, and reaches her supposed refuge on the rock face. The cause of her haste is soon evident, for a long Badakshan hound is close on her tracks, not a couple of hundred yards behind, and giving tongue in short excited yelps. As the hound

reaches one side of the precipice and begins to creep cautiously along a snowy ledge, the doe, wandering on and invisible to him, has reached the farther side, and turns round again towards the centre of the rock. I signal to the Mehtar not to shoot, for it is evident that hunter and hunted are going to meet nose to nose on a ledge about an inch wide, and the solution of the problem will be interesting. Only a corner of rock now separates them, and both reach it simultaneously. A chorus of *Ya allah* burst from the spectators in our gallery as the doe, without one moment's hesitation, sprang straight out into mid-air and went down. A gallant bid for life it was, and suitably rewarded, for, leaning over, we saw her recover her footing in deep snow two hundred feet down, dash on to the stream, across, and away to safety on the line her lord and master had taken before. The hound could do nothing but extricate himself from the precipice, which done, he sat down and barked foolishly.

There was nothing more, and we returned, the Mehtar full of apologies at the poor sport he had shown, though, as I told him, the leap for life that doe had shown us was a sight I would have gone far to see.

The beaters came in in groups, some not

arriving for hours afterwards. The tale they told was that the body of the herd were first making straight for our rock, but something had turned them and they had gone right through the line of beaters. Tracks of two snow-leopards had been seen, and they were supposed to be the cause of the fiasco.

Now let us transfer ourselves to one of the higher valleys, nearer the axis of this mighty belt of mountain land, where the mysterious ibex in his haunts of snow and ice forms the quarry of humbler votaries. Here we are in the midst of romance and legend.

There is, even to materialistic Westerns, something almost supernatural about the ibex. When, during the fearful winters of high regions, his summer companions, markhor and urial, bear and marmot, either seek lower or warmer levels, or hibernate in comfortable underground dwellings, the ibex remains alone among the snows and drifting mists. What enables them to defy the terrific elements and escape the constant avalanches that thunder down the mountain-sides in the spring-time? How do they exist? The ordinary mortal will explain it by saying that they crowd together under rock shelters and subsist on grass-roots and juniper-sprays while the winter is at its height, and that

instinct teaches them to keep to ridges and *arrêtes* during the avalanche season, and that they are protected from the intense cold by a thick undercoat of wonderful soft wool. But every Chitrali knows well that ibex are under the special protection of the mountain fairies, the chief of whom lives among the icy pyramids and high turrets of the great mountain Tirich Mir. They know that when the earthquakes pass along these valleys, those specially gifted can see hosts of fairies streaming across the sky, riding on ibex and long-maned ponies. Men and women are now living who have been transported to the gleaming palaces of Tirich Mir and seen their inhabitants and the ibex that wander freely among them. Does not history also relate how, when the country is in urgent danger, fairies are seen by many, with their ibex squadrons, riding to the Mehtar's assistance? Does not every Kohistani know that it was by their aid alone that the army of the famous Sikh general, Bhup Singh, was surrounded on the Gilgit road and every man of them either killed or sold to the slave-dealing Mirs of Shighnan and Roshan?

The slaying of an ibex is therefore no light matter. No shikari would venture to start on a hunting trip without having first propitiated

the protecting powers. Otherwise his foot would slip on the edge of some dizzy precipice; stones would hurtle through the air, impelled by unseen hands; he would fall through into some deep ice-well in the groaning glacier; or maybe he would wander bewildered, like the Ancient Mariner, seeing fearful sights—

> And through the drifts the snowy clifts
> Did send a dismal sheen:
> Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
> The ice was all between.

But whether lying under hills of green ice, or kept in bondage by the fairy-folk of Tirich Mir, certain it is that he would never again be seen alive.

So the shikari omits none of the customary ceremonies before leaving home. His good woman first bakes him an enormous cake, which is stuffed into the folds of his gown above the girdle. He cleans his brass-bound matchlock and slings it over his shoulder, and hangs round him his bullet-pouch, powder-horn, knife, and all the miscellaneous paraphernalia of the chase. Then, after warning his wife not to allow unpurified man or woman to cross his threshold, he starts off with his leash of hounds.

At the mouth of the selected valley he flings four pieces of his loaf north, south, east, and west, invoking the special fairy of the place. "Oh guardian of this golden glen, this slave has approached thy abode. Look on him with kindness. I have come under thy silken sleeve and the hem of thy skirts. Of thy flocks, grant me but one beast. Let him be such as has no wool, has no milk, and is unable to keep up with the herd, that is thin, weak, lame, and even blind. Give keenness to my eyes and power to my limbs, so that I may slay one animal. Safeguard me from all dangers."

For the hunter of the Hindu Kush, the year is divided into numerous seasons, known under different names. There is the rutting season, when the sexes mingle in the early winter; the dead of winter, when all the ibex grounds are fathoms deep in snow; the avalanche season, when the roar of cataracts of snow is almost continuous under the morning and midday sun; the season when the lower slopes with a southern aspect form brown streaks in a white ocean of mountains; the season when fresh green grass begins to appear, and slowly spreads up the mountain to the lowest limits of eternal snow; the summer, when all the mountain-sides where earth can lie are carpeted with grass and flowers,

and game animals have their wildest range to wander over; and lastly, the season when the higher slopes take autumnal tints of red and yellow, and the ibex are found comparatively low down taking advantage of the last of the summer grazing. This is the time when the old bucks are "in pride of grease," and it is consequently perhaps the favourite shooting-time among shikaris, though, of course, their work is easiest of all in the spring, when the ibex, ravenous after their short winter commons, come low down for the first blades of fresh green grass and wormwood.

Ibex having been seen, there are two methods of proceeding, according to the excellence of the hunter's hounds. If they are of the best breed, staunch and well-trained, he can slip them at the bottom of the *nullah* and then, so to speak, go and breakfast at leisure, certain that the early morning's downward flowing air will have brought news of the ibex to the hounds, and that by the time he has finished he will find one or two of the herd rounded up into some precipice, to which he will be attracted by his hounds' baying. This is the ideal.

The real is more often something like this. The hunter, after picking up his ibex, takes his hounds well above them and sights them before

slipping. A long chase follows, the hounds hunting their game from precipice to precipice, the shikari keeping them in sight or hearing as best he may. A long day's hunt in deep snow and frequently the most appallingly dangerous ground, is the usual thing, the end of which may be a shot or may not. Much of course depends on the suitability of the valley for this kind of hunting. The best *nullahs* which have been pointed out to me, all have the same characteristics: the greater part of the ground is comparatively easy, but somewhere in the middle is a great scarp of naked rock, from which it would be impossible for the hounds to move a beast which had once taken refuge there.

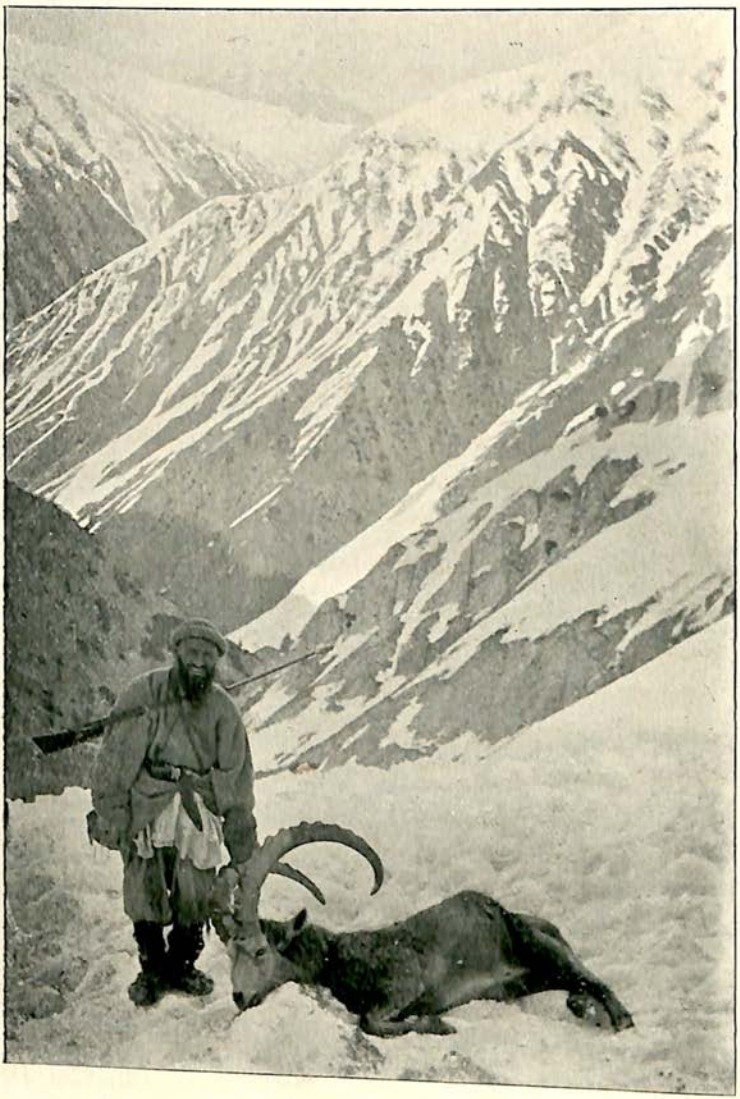
Imagine the scene at such a moment: the ibex standing on a ledge or niche in some sheer cliffs of rock, turning this way and that; the exhausted hounds lying at the bottom with lolling tongues, baying as they lie and taking snatches at the snow. Enter the shikari from above at a dizzy height, peering over the edge. The range is too far for his rude weapon. He examines the ground with the eye of a cragsman born and bred, to whom giddiness and nerves are unknown. His feet, wrapped round with strips of untanned hide, will stand firm on rock which would appear as impracticable for one in nailed boots as the danc-

ing of a hornpipe on the dome of St Paul's. But the risks of rocks glazed by ice, stone shoots, all the hundred and one perils that beset one who would climb on rock,—all these he knows and appreciates. Alone and encumbered with his hunting-gear, he lets himself down and trusts himself step by step with infinite care on ground where none but the most adventurous Alpine climbers, roped and in company, would venture.

The shot he takes lying down, with the muzzle of his weapon resting on or against a stone. Lucky he deems himself if the beast goes head over heels, whizzing down to the anxious hounds, for his agate-cored balls leave as much to be desired in point of efficiency as his old musket in point of accuracy. Perhaps the finish only comes at the end of a wearisome chase after a wounded beast, the termination of which may be success or failure.

With the shikari as with the Sheikh Sadis' dervish, "his inn is wherever darkness may find him"; but if the rigours of a night under the stars are mitigated by the skin of a freshly killed ibex for a covering and his bread helped down with morsels of roasted liver, he is as happy as a king.

In this sport very much depends on the hounds, and a good pair are very highly prized.



Shikari and ibex.

Like the ponies of these highlands, the best breeds come from Badakshan, and look like a cross between a Borzoi and a collie. Before the hunting season comes on, shikaris harden and condition their hounds by pitching them into some icy torrent several times a day,—a course which the writer was once recommended to follow with a favourite spaniel somewhat inclined to *embonpoint.*

The successful shikari, on his way home, sings the quaint hunting-song called the *ghoru.* As he nears his village, men and boys run out to relieve him of his kit and load of meat and horns,—the latter destined to grace the nearest saint's shrine. The whole hamlet joins in the chorus, those not helping with the loads sitting down on the roofs of their houses and with little fingers in their ears (like a huntsman!) rendering the song at the highest pitch of their voices :—

Oh valley open for me, hé ho ;
Blood-stained are my hands, hé ho.

Deer-like are thine eyes, hé ho,
Seeing after death, hé ho.

Rise I in the night, hé ho,
Crouching I await thee, hé ho.

Thy feet they leave a trail, hé ho ;
Thy horns they graze the sky, hé ho.

Food from the unseen, hé ho;
Thou art given by God, hé ho.

From ridge to ridge I spy thee, hé ho;
I would know thee again and again, hé ho.

I see thy various shapes, hé ho;
I track thee from ledge to ledge, hé ho.

In the midst of the herd I strike, hé ho;
Face to face I slay thee, hé ho.

Thou the ibex of my kitchen, hé ho;
Thou the guest of this evening, hé ho.

Thou the high and unattainable, hé ho,
Now descend through my smoke-hole, hé ho.

The meat is actually taken into the shikari's house through the hole in the roof which serves for a chimney, and there received by the members of his family, he himself entering in by the door.

The usual quarry in the Hindu Kush is, as has been said, markhor and ibex, but when the snow is deep and a herd of urial have been marked down in a suitable place—that is to say, low down on flattish ground—a whole village will turn out and mob the poor beasts to death with their dogs, and there is a recorded instance at Gilgit when a big herd was so wiped out. As a rule, urial, who trust for safety more to speed and activity than getting into inaccessible places, say good-bye to hounds and hunters. My old

shikari used to tell of a herd of these animals that escaped him by swimming the Indus,—an extraordinary feat. "But ibex too," he used plaintively to add, "used to give my hounds a lot of trouble."

Really big battues, as a matter of fact, are now, and always have been, extremely rare, though old sportsmen of the Himalaya love talking about them. I once asked an old grey-beard, after hearing one of these gory tales, how it was that so many animals still remained. "Sahib," he said, "the more the seed the heavier the crop, is it not? And the more blood spilt on the ground this year, the larger the herds of ibex next." And this is the common belief, especially among the Kafirs.

A MORNING WITH THE MEHTAR'S FALCONS.

MORNING had broken, but the climbing sun was still hidden from the dwellers in the towers and hamlets of Chitral by the great mountain masses to the east when our party rode out of the British Agency gates and down the steep path leading to the bazar. There had been a hard frost in the night, and the air was keen and dry, making the snow-capped mountains stand out hard and sparkling. Crossing the wooden bridge over the stream which issues from the Chitral gorge, we noticed that it was half covered over with ice. As we clattered into the bazar, through which our road lay, people were just awaking to the day's work. A Bajauri trader was watching his pony-drivers throw the morning feed of chaff before the line of muffled-up animals which were to carry his goods north to far Badakshan as soon as the snows on the passes were sufficiently melted. A group of fur-clad

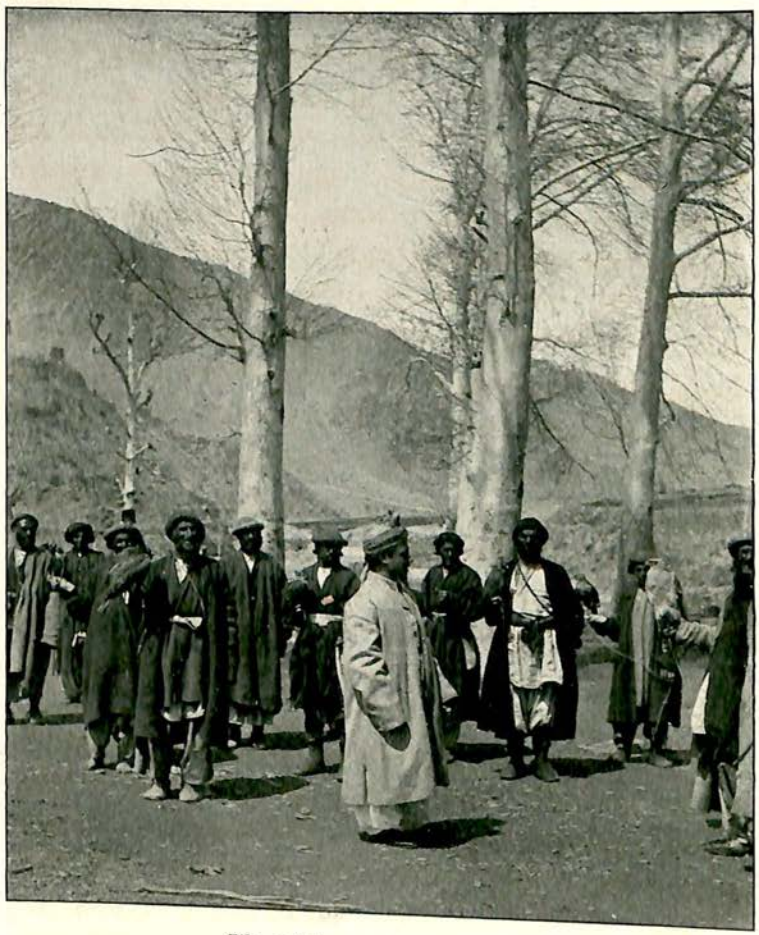
men, whose fair complexions betokened their origin to be north of the Hindu Kush, were preparing their early cup of tea. Shop doors were being opened, and clouds of dust voluming forth showed that the morning clean-up was going on. The bazar passed, the Mehtar's fort, with its four towers, came in sight down among the *chinar*-trees, where the river flowed.

As soon as we appeared, a crowd of men who were waiting outside the fort began to show signs of life, and shortly afterwards to move along the road which joined with ours a quarter of a mile farther on. As our roads converged, we recognised the Mehtar at the head of the procession on a good-looking Badakshan pony. A dozen Chitrali nobles and retainers, who happened at the time to be doing feudal service in the fort, formed the mounted part of his retinue, the people on foot, twenty or thirty in number, being servants and followers of no particular standing.

The Mehtar, Shuja-ul-Mulk, was a young man of five-and-twenty, though old beyond his years from the stirring scenes he had witnessed. Although his personality was not at first sight striking, his face indicated the possession of both shrewdness and determination; and, indeed, to rule over Chitralis successfully, as he has done since an unexpected turn in the wheel of fortune

brought him to the top while he was still a child, he had need of both. His clothes on this occasion were the same as those of his following — the sombre-coloured though picturesque national dress, a *choga* of homespun of the same stuff, and below, baggy white *pyjamas* and long Bokhara boots. His pony, however, was gay with the silver-plated head-stall and trappings that come from Afghan Turkestan. The usual salutations given and returned, we cantered or walked, as the narrow path permitted, along the side of the impetuous Chitral river, past the quaint old bridge of black wooden beams, to where the big tributary from the Lutkoh valley mingles its blue waters with the coloured stream of the main river. Our venue was at the village of Singur, just beyond the junction; and here, suddenly turning a corner, we found ourselves in the middle of a group of some fifteen or twenty men with hawks on their fists, the Mehtar's falconers. Our *syces* were with them, and took our ponies as we dismounted.

In Chitral, among the pleasures of a pleasure-loving people, hawking comes first and polo second,—neither of them a sport one would expect to find flourishing in a country which is a labyrinth of deep valleys, impassable torrents, and precipitous mountains. The former was introduced from Badakshan and the Khanates of Central Asia,—a



The Mehtar and his falconers.

legacy from the earliest times when kings and emperors, from Alexander the "two-horned" downwards, found in it a relaxation from empire-making and empire-breaking. In Chitral, however, the sport took root, and found so congenial a soil that the falconers of this country are now, in some of its branches at least, unrivalled by any. Who, for instance, in England would believe that a wild-caught goshawk could be manned, trained, and flown at game on the fourteenth day after taking? And yet this is by no means an uncommon feat in Chitral. Here five days is considered ample period in which to train a sparrow-hawk, and four days a merlin.

The training of the bigger hawks is always placed in the hands of professional falconers, but there are probably few people of the upper classes in Chitral who are not capable of training a sparrow-hawk or one of the smaller falcons. Indeed, it is the common gibe against the poorer nobles that instead of trying to improve their position they are content to loaf about their orchards all day with sparrow-hawks on their fists. The professional falconers, of whom there are a large number, mostly belong to families who came originally from Badakshan, the home and birthplace of the royal sport.

The most celebrated of the Mehtar's falconers,

or *Mir-Shikar*, was present to-day,—an old man with a beard dyed red, a bright eye, and a hooked nose, not altogether in appearance unlike one of his own favourites. He was in charge of the Mehtar's most prized possession, a Shunkhar falcon, one of the largest and rarest of the long-winged hawks,—a magnificent bird, but of too little use as a pot-hunter for her ownership to be a matter of envy to people of lower degree, even if this had been possible. These hawks, as a matter of fact, never do pass into vulgar hands, for the Mehtar has the prescriptive right to every one that is taken in his country, as well as to all peregrines and goshawks, excepting the tiercel of the latter; so all that are caught are either kept in the *mehtari* mews or given away by him to neighbouring princes. Next in order of importance to the Shunkhar came the peregrines, of which there were two,—wild-looking, dark-eyed birds, the embodiment of the power of swift flight; three splendid goshawks, and several tiercels of this species; some Shahin falcons; and a number of sparrow-hawks. To be fully representative of the hawks used in Chitral, there should have been included a *charkh* or Saker falcon, and two kinds of merlins; but the last few seasons having been bad ones, neither of these kinds had been taken, nor were in any one's possession in Chitral.



Mir-Shikar and Shunkhar falcon.

Of all the hawks in use in Chitral, the goshawk is most esteemed. She is, *par excellence*, the hawk for a mountainous country, where long flights are not wanted. Next in order, in the Chitrali's estimation, comes the Shahin. The bigger long-winged falcons go too far; and once out of view, their recovery in this extremely difficult country is always doubtful. They are lost to sight behind some mountain spur, and when this happens, are frequently lost altogether. The nature of the country, indeed, renders the long and high flights so admired in the long-winged hawks elsewhere anything but desired in Chitral; and so, as a matter of necessity, they are treated and trained very similarly to the short-winged hawks. Thus, though the lure is thrown up to attract them, they are taught to return to the fist like the latter. Chitrali falconers, who can do anything with hawks, could no doubt teach them easily enough to soar above their heads on the look-out for game, or "wait on," as it is called; but it is practically never done. It is in the training of the wild-caught goshawk, normally completed in fourteen days and frequently in less, that the perfection of the Chitrali's skill is shown. Marvellous as the feat may seem, there is really nothing esoteric about it. The result is achieved by constant care and attention, the methods used, including "wak-

ing," or sitting up all night with the newly-caught hawk, being much the same as those in vogue in England.

After loosening our ponies' girths and telling our *syces* where to take them, we looked at each hawk in turn, the Mehtar pointing out to us each one's special merits. The falconers, as he did so, unhooded those that required it, and smoothed down their neck feathers with an indescribable air of pride and affection.

The first drive was to be across the river, and the whole party, preceded by the *Hakim* of Drosh, one of the Mehtar's leading Ministers, but none the less a good falconer, walked along a narrow path at the bottom of the high cliff of conglomerate which overhung the water to a point where a frail bridge had been thrown across. The footway consisted of two slender poles, the ends of which rested on struts which were projected from the bank, the shore ends being weighted down with stones. Across the poles were laid osiers, affording not too secure a footing. One by one we crossed, the lady of the party refusing all proffered assistance, much to the surprise of the crowd, to whom all the doings of the latest arrival in Chitral were a constant source of astonishment. Not the least remarkable of these in their eyes was her seat on horseback, for it quite baffled their compre-

hension why she did not slip off on one side or the other.

A scramble over the big grey boulders in the river-bed brought us to a little track zigzagging steeply upwards, following which, in a quarter of an hour we reached a rocky eminence on a spur of the mountain which ran down into the river. A platform had been built up large enough to accommodate a score of people, the front guarded by a low wall. Below us, to our front and right, were precipitous rocks; behind us the bare mountain rose up perpendicularly till lost to view; to our left was the narrow path over straight slopes of shale by which we had ascended. The blue river, flecked here and there with white, flowed five hundred feet below us; beyond this the everlasting mountains, all but the lowest slopes of which were deep in snow. On a similar hawking platform to this, situated on a spur in the Yarkhun valley, was once pointed out to me the grave of a local chief, who, before his death, made his family swear to bury him on the spot where he had spent so many happy hours of life.

Half a mile up the river could be seen the cultivated terraces of the village of Sin, and above them long straight screes of rock fragments. Between these screes and us was another rocky spur and more screes.

Our quarry to-day was to be the chakor, a fine big partridge, very similar to the "Frenchman" at home. The peculiarity of this partridge is that when alarmed he generally tries to escape by running uphill, which a pair of very strong legs enable him to do at a pace that defies the sportsman with a gun. It is only by approaching chakor from above, or on the level when their retreat uphill is cut off, that they can be induced to rise. For this reason they are pre-eminently birds to be driven. Generations of practice have made Chitralis adepts at bringing these birds in the required direction, and almost every village has its well-known beats, the management of which is understood to a nicety. For the Mehtar's drives, every able-bodied man in the village has to turn out, and though he receives no payment, or even his day's victuals, it would never occur to him to regard the duty as a hardship. His ancestors have done the same, and in no country in the world are people more iron-bound by custom than they are here.

The chakor had already left the cultivated fields, as they usually do in the early morning, and were beginning their climb upwards when they found their progress barred by stops that had been posted a few hundred feet up, and were now in line slightly above us.

The surprised birds' anger at such treatment was, as we arrived, being shouted out from rock to rock and spur to spur, their shrill gamey call echoing back from the cliffs on the opposite side of the river. The beaters were out of sight, but the signal to begin was passed on. The owners took their hawks from the falconers, and all stood ready.

Almost as the first distant shouting of the beaters reached us, a yell of "*Hai! hai!*" from the stops above us, and garments wildly waved in the air, signalled a single chakor. A stiff wind was blowing down the valley, and he passed out of gunshot below us at a terrific pace. As he went by, the Mehtar balanced and swung forward the goshawk on his fist, and the bird, with two strokes of her powerful wings, was launched in pursuit. As she got under way the Chitralis raised a prolonged *crescendo* shout, and the excitement was so infectious that we could barely refrain from cheering her on ourselves. We leant over the wall to watch the result, and were in time to see the flying chakor a brown ball two hundred yards away, but a bigger brown mass was rapidly closing on it, and the two came to earth together. The falconer whose hawk it was plunged down the hill to retrieve the quarry and take up the hawk. The Mehtar immediately turned and took a fresh

hawk on his fist, but scarcely had he done so when shouts of "*Hāni! hāni!*" came from the stops, and a covey flew down wind close below us. The Mehtar again threw off a "gos," and another of the party a Shahin falcon. A goshawk's tiercel (a male bird) is never flown simultaneously with the female, which is bigger and stronger, and has an unpleasant way of mistaking him for her quarry! And now the game was at its height, cries of "*Hai! hai!*" or "*Hāni! hāni!*" followed each other in quick succession, and the chakor shot by us in single birds and coveys. One after another the hawks were thrown off, and it was a magnificent sight to see them wheel round in the wind, get their balance, and dart off in pursuit. As each one was thrown off, the falconer in charge dashed after her at full speed to take up the hawk if a kill had been scored, or to call her off if unsuccessful. The latter is done by cries of "*Doh! doh!*" for goshawks and the short-winged kind, and "*Koh! koh!*" for the long-winged hawks. To attract the latter, the lure made of crow's feathers is also thrown up into the air and whirled about. Both sorts come back on to the falconer's fist from long distances. If the flight is successful, the quarry's head is cut off, and the hawk, after being rewarded with the brain, is brought back for a fresh flight, and in this way the same

hawk is frequently flown many times in a morning.

In Chitral, falconers, besides being masters of their own art, have need to be skilled cragsmen, as their hawks frequently take them among precipices and into the most dangerous ground. There was none of this sort of cragman's work to-day, but a little incident occurred which showed us what these falconers are capable of. A young goshawk had been thrown off at a chakor which swung round to the right to make across the river. The owner of the falcon was delighted to see his young bird, a tiercel, bind to his quarry in mid-air over the river, and carry him to the opposite bank. It was necessary to take the hawk up as quickly as possible, as he had not been flown at game more than once or twice before; so the falconer, in order to avoid going round by the bridge, got across by worming himself along the hollow stem of a long thin poplar which served to conduct a small irrigation stream across the river. The poplar trembled and bent under his weight, and looked as if either it or the side struts supporting it must go, but luckily both held firm. The falconer, after warily approaching the hawk where he sat "depluming" the chakor, took him up successfully, and returned by the same precarious way, with

the hawk on his fist,—a feat of no small difficulty and danger.

The beaters gradually drew nearer. Precipitous places where they could not go were searched by rocks being dislodged and rolled down. These went bounding and crashing down the hillside till, with a huge splash, they buried themselves in the water, frequently shooting half-way across the river. By this time the intervals between the chakor became longer, and they came in single birds, turned out with difficulty from rock crevices and other hiding-places, and all the hawks, with the exception of the Shunkhar, had been flown several times. By far the prettiest flights to watch were those of the peregrines and Shahins, which stooped and struck their quarry to the ground instead of seizing them in mid-air. The Shunkhar is not flown in these sorts of drives, but is reserved for heron and crow-hawking.

The beaters came up to us, a wild picturesque lot of men, full of talk, and anxious to hear about the sport. The bag on this occasion was not very good compared with the number of flights that had been witnessed; but this was owing to the high wind, which brought the birds down at a pace which frequently enabled them, with the start thus gained, fairly to outfly the hawks.

The total was fifteen chakor and a mallard. The latter misguided bird was flying down the river, and fell an easy prey to one of the Mehtar's goshawks.

Though a few duck are found about Chitral in the winter, the regular duck-hawking season does not begin till March, when wild-fowl are travelling northward to the Central Asian lakes after spending the winter on the *jhils* and tanks of India, where the good living they have been enjoying has put them in first-class condition. The *modus operandi*, which, it must be confessed, savours somewhat of poaching, is as follows. After a settling of wild-duck has been marked, usually in some sandy bay of the river or a flooded rice-field, the hawking party stalk them in line. In the middle are the falconers, two or more in number, and at either end of the line is a man with a copper kettle-drum, generally bound with red velvet. On arriving as close as possible to the duck without being seen, the drummers commence a tremendous dinning, and the hawks, thrown off at the same instant, are in and among the duck while they are rising off the water. In this way often as many duck are bagged as there are hawks. The rationale of the method is simple: if the hawks are thrown off before the duck rise, the

latter refuse to leave the water, and the hawks will not attack them there. If, on the other hand, the duck get well into their flight, they will generally outfly the hawks unless a start is obtained from well above them; so to avoid the double difficulty this ingenious method has been evolved. The Mehtar has built a small house on the river a mile or so above Chitral, and during the duck-hawking season his falconers remain there most of the forenoon, awaiting the arrival of a flight of duck. About this spot there are a number of bays and back-waters in the river, all of which are flanked by walls built up of round boulders, to afford the falconers cover in approaching.

The drive over, we descended and crossed the river. Preparations had been made for a drive on the other bank; but owing to a report arriving of a large spotted eagle that had been seen to haunt the cliffs lower down in the direction the driven birds would take, and which would have made short work of any falcon coming his way, the idea of a drive there was abandoned. These spotted eagles (*Spizoetus nipalensis*) are very common in Gilgit and Chitral, where they do an immense amount of damage amongst not only game birds, but the young of ibex, markhor, and urial too. The late Mehtar, Nizam-ul-Mulk,

who was passionately fond of hawking, had one of them caught and trained, report says with success; but their size and weight, not to mention their voracious appetite, preclude their being brought into general use. Nizam-ul-Mulk, some of my readers may remember, was the Mehtar whose murder, which took place when he was out hawking, started the conflagration which ended in the Chitral campaign. He was shot in the back while watching the flight of one of his falcons. The present Mehtar, remembering his brother's fate, at the time I am writing of, always had his back guarded by men he could trust wherever he went.

On our road home we came to a flat sandy plain over which the river spread out below us into several glittering streams, and where the Mehtar hoped to be able to exhibit the prowess of his Shunkhar on a crow. Luck was with us, for some black dots on the water's edge were seen moving about. After the head falconer had assured himself they were not choughs, which decline to play the game, he took his Shunkhar up the hill above us, and sent a man to put the birds up in our direction. As soon as they were on the wing the falcon was thrown off, and made a terrific stoop on one of the crows; but when his enemy was seemingly within a foot of

him, the wily bird cleverly, and apparently without the least exertion, shifted to one side, and she missed. The rest of the crows flew off, and the field was left clear for the contest. The falcon rising again, as if on the rebound, made another stoop, which was similarly evaded, and another, and another. Each stoop called forth a groan of excitement from the onlookers. For a time this exceedingly pretty game went on, and it just seemed a case of which of the two could last the longest. A game it looked, for the crow seemed to take matters so easily, and evade his adversary with so little exertion, that one almost forgot he was playing for his life. Suddenly a puff of black feathers. *Habet!* The two birds descend slowly together, and all is over.

The sun had long since flooded the valley, reminding us, if our appetites had not, that the day was getting on, and breakfast still before us. So home was the word. We said good-bye to the Mehtar where our roads parted, he deprecating our thanks for the morning's sport, and ten minutes later we were satisfying our hunter's hunger. The morning had been one which, for beauty of scenery and general picturesqueness, not to mention the wonderful skill exhibited by these hillmen in training the wild-

est of God's creatures to do their bidding, was not one to be easily forgotten; and half of us at the breakfast-table were ready to lament the invention of "villainous saltpetre," that had almost put an end in our own country to so fascinating a sport.

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THE ORPIMENT MINES OF CHITRAL.

In the days of Aman-ul-Mulk the Great (but not the good), the two chief sources of revenue in Chitral were slaves and golden orpiment. The prices realised for both these commodities were approximately the same per cwt., but as the slaves were much more easily obtainable than the orpiment, the trade in the first-named article was as brisk as the other was slack. Nowadays the reverse is the case: Chitrali boys and girls are no longer on the market, while the mineral is exported in comparatively large quantities. The mines are situated in a flank of the great giant Tirich Mir, a mountain peopled, as every Chitrali schoolboy knows, by legions of fairies. There are other minerals in the mountain beside orpiment: lead, copper, sulphur, and possibly others. Orpiment, however, is the only one that is regularly worked.

My camp happening to be near the Tirich valley, at a village a few miles from where this



Tirich Mir.

stream joins the Turikho river, I determined to devote a day to visiting the mines, which had never previously been seen by any European, or even by any Chitrali other than those whose occupation it was to delve for the yellow stone. The latter information was given to clinch the arguments that had previously been brought to bear why I should *not* visit the mines, and great was the surprise of my naïve informant when he found it had the opposite effect. Starting early from camp, the village of lower Tirich was reached after four hours in the saddle, at a walk *bien entendu*, as Chitrali roads are not adapted for more rapid progression—one foot of the horseman occasionally hanging over a precipice. A tent had been pitched in the deep shade of a garden, —as unnecessary an insult to the magnificent chestnut and mulberry trees whose branches formed a canopy overhead as was the spreading of a carpet to the smooth turf under foot. Here breakfast, and after breakfast a pipe, with which, stretched at full length under the giant chestnuts, I lay "a thinkynge, a thinkynge."

My thoughts had travelled far when my Afridi orderly, whom I had brought with me as much for his philosophic remarks as for his general utility, came and said that if I wanted to see the orpiment mines that day it was time to be

moving. Loath as I was to leave the cool of the garden, I said good-bye to my host and climbed on to my disgusted pony, and we resumed our road up the valley. After an hour's riding we came to a foaming torrent issuing from a narrow gorge to our right. My guide, who was the *aksakal* of the mines, said the mines were "up there," and that we must now go on foot. A track was visible up the side of the mountains to some rocks that seemed a great height above us, and this we followed. The sun was hot, the hill was steep, and I found it necessary to stop once or twice to admire the view before reaching the crags, which were not, as I had fondly hoped, the end of our climb. A bit of orpiment was here picked up that had been dropped on the way, and afforded a welcome excuse for an "easy." A bright, golden-yellow, lustrous piece of stone, of what mineralogists lucidly call a "lamellar texture," flaky like mica and flexible like asbestos; it is the *auri pigmentum* or paint of gold of the ancients. It was supposed by them to contain the precious metal, but it is needless to say that it does not. Its use in commerce is to manufacture the beautiful colour known as king's yellow. As it is a compound of arsenic, I inquired from my guide if it was poison. He replied by putting half of the piece picked up into his mouth and

eating it, and he offered the other half to me. As I was not saturated with arsenic, as it is probable he was, I declined the proffered morsel, saying that I had already had breakfast, a piece of wit which seemed to amuse him vastly. Apropos of eating arsenic, my orderly related a tale of a wedding-party in Tirah at which he and every one present had been poisoned, their "enemy" having mixed arsenic with the sherbet, and of the cure effected by the local *hakim* by giving them water in which copper had been boiled. The tale pointed no moral except the unsuitability of arsenic as a diet, but by the time it was concluded we were ready to go on. After a few minutes' clambering over the rocks, we found the path ran along one side of the gorge we had seen from below, the torrent booming away out of sight far below us. Near the path was a curious cone-shaped pillar of conglomerate about sixty feet high with a big flat stone on the top.

"Who built that?" I asked.

"The fairies," was the reply, promptly given.

I thought as much, and here was the tree close by on which passers-by put their offerings. My guide and the miners with him each tore strips from their garments, the loss of which was not, I must say, very noticeable, and tied them on

the branches. The whole juniper-tree was thus decorated, and presented quite a gay appearance. My orderly, with the superior knowledge of one who had travelled in railway-trains, was at first inclined to make fun of the tale, but catching sight on ahead of two similar pillars the summit of each of which, high up against the sky, was topped by a big flat stone, he became grave and remarked that one such stone might have been an accident, but three altogether was obviously the work of the unseen army. So he too solemnly tore a strip off his blue paggri and attached it to a vacant twig. I contributed a cigarette-end and we passed on. The guide was relating as we went along how people that had passed that stone at night had been seized by strong arms from behind and borne away. I capped his story by telling how an Englishman,[1] climbing Nanga Purbat some years ago, had been seized by the same folk and was still imprisoned there. My guide gravely accepted the story, and so we descended into the gorge in quite a ghostly state of trepidation.

Crossing the torrent by a bridge of avalanche

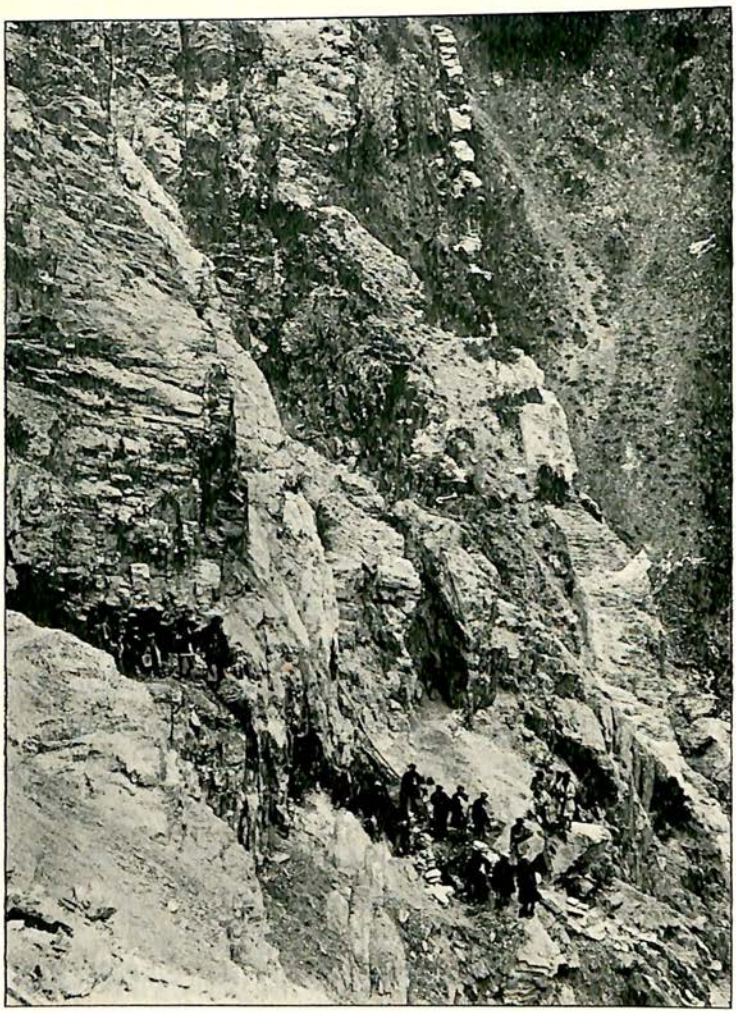
[1] This is the story related by the Chilas people about the disappearance of the well-known climber Mummery, whilst ascending one of the minor peaks of this mountain. There can be little doubt that he, with his Goorkha companion, were swept away by an avalanche.



The Mehtar's Fort, Chitral.

snow, we began an arduous ascent on the other side. After another hour's climb we came to a confused and distorted mass of shaly rock. Shortly afterwards we heard the sound of picks, and came upon thirty or forty men at work. This was a new mine and they had only got a few feet into the rock, and so far had not struck orpiment. The old mines were higher up, so on we went. After climbing three or four hundred feet we came to a rude shelter, built of juniper-branches and perched on a most airy eminence. Here a fire was burning. My thoughtful guide had provided tea, which was now ready,—green tea simmering away on the fire in a tin coffee-pot. We all sat down on stones, sugar was produced, and three little rusty tin mugs. My host poured out a cup, put in a lump of sugar, stirred it up with his finger, and handed it to me. Having long since learnt the folly of fastidiousness, and very thirsty after our hot climb, I drank it and two more cups on end and found it excellent. My host did likewise, after which a few of the miners were presented with half a cup each. The pot empty, mine host emptied the green tea-leaves, looking like boiled cabbage, into his hand, swallowed three-quarters himself, and divided the remaining quarter be-

tween two of his satellites. They accepted and ate it without any symptoms of unusual pleasure, and we proceeded on our way. A hundred yards farther on we came to a rock face with a narrow ledge running along it in a downward direction, and then zigzagging to some little platforms below us, on which a number of miners were standing near some holes on the hillside. These were the mines. We proceeded carefully down the ledge, as a slip would have meant an unpleasantly rapid journey to near the bottom of the gorge. The holes were about the size a hyena might walk into without much inconvenience. On my arrival five or six men crawled out, their faces covered with yellow dust and their eyes somewhat bloodshot, giving them a peculiarly ghastly appearance. The orpiment, I was told, induced a peculiar condition of the hands of the miners, but was not otherwise injurious to health. The former was obvious enough, the hands of many of the men I saw being shrunken to the bone and of a dark slaty colour, and covered all over with knots and excrescences, giving them the appearance of the claws of some big bird. As regards their health, there were some old men among the miners who had been at the works since boyhood, but most of them looked thin and hag-



The Orpiment mines and miners.

gard. They can only work during the summer, when the ground is not under snow; in the winter they remain in their villages below, and this, no doubt, accounts for their not suffering more than they do.

Having come so far, it was, of course, necessary to see the interior of the mines, and I told my guide to lead on. He disappeared into one of the holes with extraordinary ease. I followed more deliberately, distinctly surprised at being able to get into it at all. After four yards' crawling, we found ourselves in a small chamber, about eighteen feet long, in which one could stand upright. The air was fresher than I expected. Several miners with torches of pitch pine were standing, but there were no signs of the mineral I had come so far to see. On my asking where it was, "Farther on" was the reply, rather to my surprise, as the cave seemed to end there. On looking closer, however, I saw what appeared to be a well in one corner. There was also a narrow ramp leading up to the roof along one side of the cave. I was looking at this when I heard a muffled rumbling. A light appeared in the roof, followed by a man, who emerged from a small aperture that had escaped my observation. My guide, in the meantime, had

been letting himself down the well at the farther end, and I prepared to follow him. Sitting down on the floor, I let myself down feet foremost. It was quite dark in the well, but it was obvious the shaft did not go straight down. On the whole, it must have been somewhat easier than descending a factory chimney, as there were here and there projecting ledges of rock on which to put one's toes, but to any one not a trained sweep or an orpiment miner it was difficult enough. After descending twenty feet or so, I felt my legs swinging in space, a hand clutched my foot and guided it on to a rock, and I let myself down on to *terra firma*. It was another chamber, considerably smaller than the upper one; the air was very close. Still no orpiment. A hole appeared to lead away in a downward direction from the farther end of the chamber, and on one side a lot of *débris* had fallen down. The latter was pointed out to me by my guide, who cheerfully remarked that it was the grave of eight men. It appeared that a few months before, whilst these unfortunates were working at the farther end of the passage now closed by the heap of earth and stones I was looking at, a fall of rock had occurred and immured them.

My guide now disappeared into the hole at the end of the chamber, and I had to follow. There was no room to crawl, and the only mode of progression was to lie down full length and work oneself along with one's toes. As the air was very foul and full of sulphurous dust, I made up my mind not to visit any more orpiment mines in future, and if it had been possible to turn round and retire I think I should have done so. After traversing some forty feet, which seemed as many miles, in this painful manner, we at length reached another chamber in which it was possible to sit up. Here at last was the orpiment, and it was really almost worth the trouble of coming to see. Except where the roof had been blackened by the smoke of our torches — the miners do their work in the dark for the sake of the purer air — the walls of the mine appeared a scintillating, dazzling mosaic of gold and rubies. The light from our torches was thrown back from an infinite number of glittering points, in which every shade of red and yellow, from the deepest ruby to the most brilliant scarlet, and from old gold to the palest sulphur, were intermingled to form an indescribable blaze of colour. After admiring this subterranean splendour for a while, and breaking off a few specimens

of various hues, my soul began to long for the upper air. My guide proposed further researches, as we had not yet come to the end of the mine, but I had seen enough, and the air was intolerably close and dust-laden. So we commenced the ascent from Avernus, which on this occasion, I was pleased to find, was considerably easier than the descent. We had reached the first chamber, and I was making a dive into the passage through which the white daylight came streaming, when my guide stopped me and insisted on our going out through the hole in the roof. As this passage had the merit of leading out above the difficult rock face I had traversed in coming, and which, not being after a long-horned markhor, I was not anxious to cross again, I agreed, and after another period of mole-like progression in the dark, we emerged into the dazzling light and drank in the sweet fresh air. Covered with red, yellow, and black dust, we must have presented an extraordinary appearance.

It was now getting late, and the *aksakal*, no doubt thinking of the fairy-haunted gorge, wanted to be off; so after lightening the hearts of the wan miners, who were to spend their next few months in these dreary caverns, with

unexpected *bakshish*, we took the path home, only stopping once to plunge head and arms into the ice-cold torrent at the bottom of the gorge. Thus refreshed and cleansed, we made short work of the road to camp.

ON THE "ROOF OF THE WORLD."

"And when you leave this country and ride three days north-east always among mountains, you get to such a height that 'tis said to be the highest place in the world. . . . There are great numbers of all kinds of wild beasts; among others wild sheep of great size, whose horns are good six palms in length. The plain is called Pamier, and you ride across it for twelve days together, finding nothing but a desert without habitation or any green thing."—YULE'S 'Marco Polo.'

THERE is nothing which arouses quite the same sort of romantic interest as crossing a great divide. A longing to know what is on the other side is an instinct of which one is conscious when surmounting even ordinary ranges; and how much stronger it becomes when the drop down the farther side brings one to a new continent, only those who have experienced it can realise.

I had been marching for some days up the Hunza Valley, a deep rift winding amidst some of the highest mountains on earth, and had arrived at the foot of one of the few passes which cross the Mustagh range. On the morrow we—that is, I and my small party of porters and servants—would leave the river system of India and



The "Pass of a Thousand Ibex."

enter that of Central Asia, with streams draining into inland seas or meandering about waste places till lost in the sands; the land—

> Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
> Through caverns measureless to man,
> Down to a sunless sea.

The snow-line was low for the time of year, and we had entered it early that morning, so we spent the night in a cave named after one Gul Kwaja. Towards evening a big herd of ibex had been seen among the high crags above our den, and through the night I heard between my dreams the rattle of stones dislodged by their feet. We started on the climb over the pass, which is picturesquely called Mintaka — "the pass of a thousand ibex"—about 3 A.M., by the half light of a setting moon. The cold was intense, and furs being far too heavy for climbing in at these altitudes, the exertion only just served to keep one from getting numbed.

An adventure befell us at the outset which might have proved fatal to one of our party. No one having crossed the pass that year, the guide took a wrong line and led us across an ice slope that was concealed by snow. The first I knew of it was seeing his dim figure begin to slide downwards, first slowly, then more rapidly. We

were not roped, and as his pace increased it seemed that nothing on earth could save him. Near the end of my line, however, carrying a load, was a man of Hunza, whose quickness to grasp the situation was only equalled by his resource. Dropping his load he sprang out on to a projecting point of rock near which the man would pass, and as he slid by, with the point of his native-made ice-axe he gaffed him in his loose clothing as one might a salmon. It was most cleverly and promptly done. Dawn had broken before, with the help of a rope all our party were safely across the treacherous slope, and it was midday before the crest of the pass was reached. The rest of the day was spent in toiling through deep snow, now softened by the sun into the worst possible condition for marching, and evening closed in while we were still pounding through it. The night's bivouac under the stars, my first on the "roof of the world," with the thermometer well below zero, will long remain in my memory.

> The cold earth slept below,
> Above the cold sky shone,
> And all around, with a chilling sound,
> From caves of ice and fields of snow,
> The breath of Night like death did flow
> Beneath the sinking moon.

Next day we continued our march down the

long snow-filled valley which leads to the Tagdam-bash Pamir, another trying day in snow which became soft before noon. Many of my porters, sturdy men from Hunza, were suffering from snow-blindness, so periodic halts were called to drop into their eyes some cocaine solution which I had included in my small medicine-case. For my own part, though my eyes were not affected, the glare of the snow, combined with the cold wind, had made my face and lips swell and chap to such an extent that I doubt if my dearest friend would have recognised me. I was not sorry, therefore, when the distant barking of dogs indicated human habitations. These presently came in sight, though still far away, in the shape of a Khirgiz encampment—a few dome-shaped tents pitched on the side of the valley where black streaks showed the snow was beginning to melt. Coming nearer, some children disappeared inside, and an old Khirgiz patriarch with flowing beard came out and took us in. Never shall I forget the welcome of those tent-dwellers. Chinese tea in blue porcelain cups, hot bread, curds and clotted cream in wooden bowls, were served by the kindly women of the household, who bustled in and out of the little *andarun*, or females' apartment, and the adjoining kitchen with real anxiety for their guests' com-

fort. After living in Muslim lands where females are secluded, there was something rather homely and pleasing in finding oneself among people whose women are treated as something more than slaves or toys. The nature of a nomadic life makes the *purdah* system an impossibility, with the result that among no other people in the East is the standard of morality so high as among the pastoral tribes of Asia.

More delightful than anything was the knowledge that I was at length on the *Bam-i-dunya*, the mysterious "roof of the world," a land which has probably seen fewer changes, both in its aspect and inhabitants, than any other since the birth of the human race. Here were the milk-fed people and the Scythian latticed huts mentioned by Greek writers long before the Christian era, and the identical landscape described by Chinese pilgrims of the fifth and sixth centuries. My surroundings were at that moment in all probability exactly the same as those in which the illustrious Marco Polo found himself when he passed through this and other strange lands on his journey to the court of the great Kaan Kublai. Lastly, I was in the country of the giant wild sheep, discovered by the same traveller, and deemed fabulous, like many others of the bold Venetian's tales, till modern exploration

came and vindicated the honour of the greatest traveller that ever lived.

My first shooting camp was pitched at the western end of the Pamir, in a valley called Kukturuk, as dreary a spot at the time of year as any in Asia—a snowy plain, only relieved by patches of green and blue which marked the turns of a frozen stream. Around us rolling mountains, whose uniform whiteness was only broken here and there by the black of a scarped rock. My Kanjuti porters had returned to their own country, having been replaced by *yaks* and magnificent shaggy camels of the two-humped kind, supplied by my Khirgiz friends, to carry tents and baggage. The camels were loaded with a *yurt*, one of the portable felt huts in which the nomads of these parts live. They consist of a lattice framework, over which pieces of felt are thrown, the whole being anchored to the ground by ropes. In the centre is a stove made of mud, in which *burtza* roots or dry *argols* are burnt, the only fuel obtainable on the Pamirs. These *yurts* are both roomy and warm dwellings, but the acrid smoke, which finds an escape with difficulty through a hole in the roof, soon drove me to the conclusion that my own tent was preferable, in spite of its coldness. The only warm spot inside the latter was the interior of my sleeping-bag of reindeer

skin, and it will be believed that the daily process of emerging from it at an hour long before dawn was not unalloyed pleasure. An astounding series of garments, with leather over all, receives me, but down to the long boots of soft leather on which I had been sleeping to keep them from freezing into boards, the exchange is a poor one. Ablutions are a concession to having once been civilised, but there is no temptation to linger over them. Breakfast, of mutton chops smoked over an unsavoury fire, and tea that freezes while you wait, is similarly a duty which has to be faced with some determination.

Outside I am met by a cutting wind like a blast from the North Pole. Figures come crunching towards me over the snow—those of my Khirgiz hunter and the old stalker I had brought with me from Gilgit, Gul Sher, my faithful companion for many years in the Himalaya. They are pulling along by their nose-ropes our riding animals, the hirsute and uncouth *yaks*. We mount and disappear in the darkness, and the camp settles down to sleep till warmed into life by the beams of the rising sun. By that time we have gone far, our steeds sometimes slipping and sliding over a surface of ice, sometimes floundering in deep snow; but when possible we keep to the slopes, where the wind has swept the surface compara-



Our steeds on the Pamirs.

tively free. From an equestrian point of view the *yak's* failings are counterbalanced by a good many useful qualities. He is unequalled on steep ground, and at great altitudes he will plough steadily through a depth of snow in which ponies would flounder hopelessly, and finally, he can carry a great weight of impedimenta in addition to his rider. Against this he has a tendency to foot-soreness, a phlegmatic nature which nothing can rouse, and an irritating way of panting and grinding his teeth. His straight shoulders and low-set-on head arouse in his rider, when descending a steep slope, most unpleasant expectations of the result of a slip on a rolling stone. This is bad enough at his usual slow pace, but when, as has sometimes been known, he (figuratively speaking) takes the bit between his teeth and bolts down a steep and rocky mountain-side, it is difficult to imagine a more undesirable position than that of the individual on his back.

As dawn breaks, the air seems to grow more and more intensely cold. Presently the grey sky turns blue; the sun has risen somewhere. His yellow beams soon strike the mountain-tops, and we watch the line of light creep slowly down the long white slopes towards us. About this time the *yaks* are left behind and we begin ascending to points from which a wider view can be obtained. Stalk-

ing-glasses are pulled out and the ground in front carefully examined. If *poli* are there, they will be seen fast enough on the snow; it may be a big herd of rams on the move at this early hour. Some of them are on the look-out, while others are scraping at the snow with their forefeet to get a nibble at the roots of last summer's grass. It may be that a grey, cloud-like patch on a distant snow slope reveals a big herd of females, all lying down facing windwards. Possibly, however, no *poli* are in sight; only a gaunt wolf trots across the field of view, or the eye is attracted by a slight movement to a covey of snow-partridges nestling together under a rock. There were few days, however, on the Pamirs during the course of which *poli* were not seen — generally, of course, females or small rams, for really big heads are rare.

My first stalk after *poli* ended in a fiasco. The herd was in an ideal spot for an approach, and I had no difficulty in getting within seventy or eighty yards of them, and as I planted my elbows in the snow to take my shot, I looked on the big ram of the herd as already mine. But as I pulled the trigger, the cartridge snapped like the cap of a toy pistol. Off went the herd, taking enormous kangaroo-like bounds in the deep snow, their forefeet seeming scarcely to penetrate its surface. Three more cartridges snapped like the first. The

fifth was a good one, but instead of the big one of the herd, a small one dropped. My disgust was only equalled by the delight of my Khirgiz hunter. Rushing up to the dead beast, "Ghosht lazim?" he shouted, "Ghosht lazim?" ("Do you want the meat?"), and without waiting for my reply he began to strip great slabs of meat off the ram's carcase, and having bound them on the pony, he set off to camp. The cause of my cartridges snapping was without doubt the intense cold. After that I used to keep them in my pocket instead of on a belt, and at night under my pillow, and never had such another mishap.

But it is time a word was said about the appearance of Polo's sheep. To start with, he is of course nothing at all similar to the woolly *baa* sheep we are familiar with. In shape he is more like a deer, his pelage reddish fawn with the lower part white, and the white "caudal disc" very marked. Standing about eleven hands at the shoulder, the ram is a most magnificent-looking beast. A front view is required to show up his wonderful spread of horns, the record length of which (a picked-up specimen) is over six feet, measured round the curve of a single horn. At a distance, when the head is "in profile," the horns are not visible, but they give the beast's head a very characteristic shape, rather like that of a huge sparrow.

There is no wild sheep that is easy to stalk, and *poli* are no exception to the rule. Their sight is marvellously keen, and their smell even more so; the ground they inhabit is open, and the wind generally most shifty. Everything, in fact, is in their favour and against the sportsman, so that the day when a shot is obtained at an old ram, or *roosh* as he is locally called, is deserving of an entry in red in any sportsman's diary. Sometimes a stalk is frustrated in a most unexpected manner. One morning we had started when the wind was blowing a gale from the north. We had spotted a herd, and had successfully reached a boulder-covered spur from which the herd could be seen two hundred yards below us, and quite unconscious of danger. To approach nearer was impossible. By that time the gale had become a blizzard, and undulating curtains of fine hard particles of snow swept and lashed the ground with indescribable fury. Our herd seemed quite unmoved, for these sheep are protected by a thick layer of soft wool, which underlies their stiff coats and renders them impervious to any weather. Between the gusts one could see them peacefully moving about, but to aim was literally impossible. Unprotected, the eyes could not be opened in the teeth of the blizzard, while snow-goggles became caked with snow in an instant. We retired

behind a big boulder and waited, but the blizzard kept on with undiminished violence. Several times I crawled to the edge determined to risk a shot, but each time had to retire, till finally, after some hours, we could stand it no longer, and beat a retreat to camp.

Curiously enough, the biggest head shot by the writer was the result of a very simple stalk. We had topped a spur, and, as we did so, sank down into the snow, for both Gul Sher and I had spotted a ram not more than a couple of furlongs away. He was near a big detached rock, so, dropping down the reverse slope of the spur, we got the rock between him and ourselves, and the rest was easy. There turned out to be four big rams, and a truly magnificent sight they looked from the top of that rock. I should like to have watched them for a space, but *carpe diem*, seize your opportunity, a moment's delay may lose you the shot, so crack went the rifle, and the biggest ram staggered, gave two or three bounds, and rolled over.

The gigantic horns of a *poli* ram, wonderful as they appear to us, are to the unfortunate owner nothing less than a snare. Their great weight handicaps him severely when pursued by his cruel foes, chief among whom is the wolf; and from the number of rams' heads with which the

Pamirs are littered, it seems they fall an easier prey than the females. Why nature hands the male over such a comparatively helpless prey to his enemies is one of those mysteries of which I have heard of no satisfactory explanation, though we must believe that in some way or other the existence of these magnificent encumbrances is of some advantage to the race as a whole.

> So careful of the type she seems,
> So careless of the single life.

While looking out with the glasses for *poli* one morning, the writer's attention was drawn to a wolf trotting away with so big a piece of meat in his mouth that he had to sit down and rest every now and then; and shortly after more wolves appeared, evidently belonging to one pack. Their tracks all led from a point near where I was sitting, and drew my attention to the body of a freshly killed ram. The Pamir was bare and white with snow for miles, and with the glasses I could mark the course of a tragedy, of the principal performers in which I had just seen the exit. Far away were the tracks of a big herd of *poli:* a sudden onslaught by wolves, and they had bolted up the valley—all save one ram, presumably the slowest in the herd, which had been singled out. This one had shaped his course downhill. As he



A good day's work.

became exhausted in the deep snow, on the surface of which the pack ran with ease, he galloped round in rings, stood on a rock for a moment at bay, then plunged on again. The tracks became confused, showing his last desperate struggles, and now what remained of him lay in the centre of a trampled and blood-stained circle of snow.

Wolves are not the only foes of Polo's sheep. An opportunity of bagging a snow-leopard was lost when I came face to face with one of these handsome beasts on a recently killed ram. My rifle was in its cover, and by the time I had got it out he was gone like a shadow up a boulder-covered hill, on the top of which, like a great cat, he lay down to watch me, nor did all the craft of my stalker get me a shot at that embodiment of feline wariness.

The Khirgiz do all their hunting with the help of dogs, and, in view of the possibility of a wounded beast, it is well to arrange to have one or two of these animals in camp. A wounded *poli* is a far more difficult animal to approach than an unwounded one, and that is saying a good deal. Even when his injury is a mortal one, after leading one a most exhausting chase in deep snow, he may escape altogether. The story of one such pursuit, which nearly ended

in the death of my valued stalker, must conclude this sketch. We had picked up some *poli* one morning, and had made a good stalk. The herd, however, had divided in two, and while I was examining one party with the idea of picking the biggest ram, the others, which I had missed seeing, were examining me, and, before I got my shot, concluded they would not wait, and bolted, of course stampeding the others. They all went on to a bare hillside where a stalk was impossible, and remained there till evening, when they shifted their ground. I made another stalk and got a shot, killing one ram and wounding another, which went off. We were out after the latter early next morning, a man having been despatched during the night to fetch a hound from the nearest encampment. We found our ram very high up on a snow-covered ridge, on the top of which he was silhouetted against the sky as he looked down on his pursuers far below him. My Khirgiz hunter absolutely refused to climb, so Gul Sher and I started without him up a ravine that offered concealment. The ram in the meantime moved on. We followed his tracks along a ridge which was heavily corniced by snow, and presently found ourselves following them down a snow-filled gully. The snow was hard and very

steep, but we could get along by kicking steps in it with our heels. Gul Sher was some seventy yards below me, when a gust of wind took my hat off and it went bounding towards him. I shouted to him to stop it, and just as I did so an avalanche shot out of a gully which joined ours just below where I was. The snow broke away from just in front of me, leaving the rock black, bare, and glistening like the side of a house, and the whole went rushing down on Gul Sher. He had just reached my hat when he heard the avalanche, and made a desperate effort to get out of its course, but it was on him before he could move a yard towards safety, and he was immediately engulfed and lost to sight.

The roar of the avalanche died away, and all was silence. I shouted, but there was no answer. The whole thing was the occurrence of a few seconds. It is impossible to describe the feelings which came over me—of horror of my responsibility in having indirectly been the cause of the catastrophe, and of personal loss, for there seemed little chance of Gul Sher being now alive, while even the recovery of his dead body was unlikely. I worked my way down with very trembling knees. Arrived near the bottom, I saw the avalanche had spread out into a sort of fan on the plain, and on looking with my glasses I saw

something move. Hurrying down, I found Gul Sher rubbing his eyes and just recovering consciousness. The avalanche, instead of burying him, had thrown him out! There have doubtless been equally "hair-breadth" escapes in the annals of Alpine adventure, but in many years' hunting experiences in the Himalaya, this was the most extraordinary that has come to my knowledge. Gul Sher was no worse than bruised, though his clothing was torn in a remarkable way, and through the whole of his rapid descent with thousand of tons of snow he had retained his hold of my hat! He accepted his escape with the same philosophic calm with which he would have met his death. Having thanked God, he declared he heard a hound baying, and that my messenger with the hound must have arrived. We got on the ram's tracks again, and following them up, after some time came on to the *poli* standing on a boulder, round which two big Badakshi hounds were leaping and baying. Facing this way and that, he was quite unmindful of our approach, and I was glad to be able to end his sufferings.



Pitching a "yurt."



The end of his sufferings.

LEH.

I.

THE town of Leh, situated in the midst of stupendous Kara Korum Himalaya, is a meeting-place between North and South, East and West, a Nijni Novgorod in miniature. There are few places in the world where a more varied assortment of Oriental types are seen than in the long street shaded by poplars which forms the chief bazaar and rendezvous of traders. Besides natives of the place, and visitors from Baltistan and half a dozen other Himalayan principalities, there are Indians of all creeds: Pathans, some subjects of the Amir of Kabul, others belonging to independent tribes; Tajiks from Bokhara and Russian Turkestan, Khirgiz and Kalmaks, Tibetans, Chinese, and even Persians and Arabs. In its limited area are churches, temples, and mosques; while dominating the whole from an eminence at the northern end of the town is the Buddhist Monastery

attached to the castle which was the seat of government of the old Kings of Ladak.

The occasion is that of the annual entry of the British Commissioner. This official, together with a colleague appointed by the Kashmir Darbar, looks after the trade with Central Asia, and resides for the purpose half the year in the Kashmir capital and the other half in Ladak, his arrival in the latter place being always made an excuse for a fête. It would be hard to imagine a queerer spectacle than we presented as we, our numbers augmented by the élite of Leh who had come out to welcome us, toiled up the straight track across the sloping plain of sand and stones which lies between the Indus and the town. The Wazir, a black-bearded Afghan Sirdar, in dark blue and gold, bestrode a screaming Kabuli stallion. The Abbot, stout, clean-shaven, and wrinkled, in a lama's red robe and cardinal's hat, sat hunched up on a fat white Tibetan pony, which was led by an acolyte. The Spituk "Incarnation," sleek but austere, was otherwise remarkable by a wonderful yellow hat of polished papier-maché. The ex-King of Ladak, a man in these days of no political importance, but much revered by Ladakis by reason of his asceticism, prayers, and fasting, was evidently full of alarms at finding himself on the back of a



Leh.

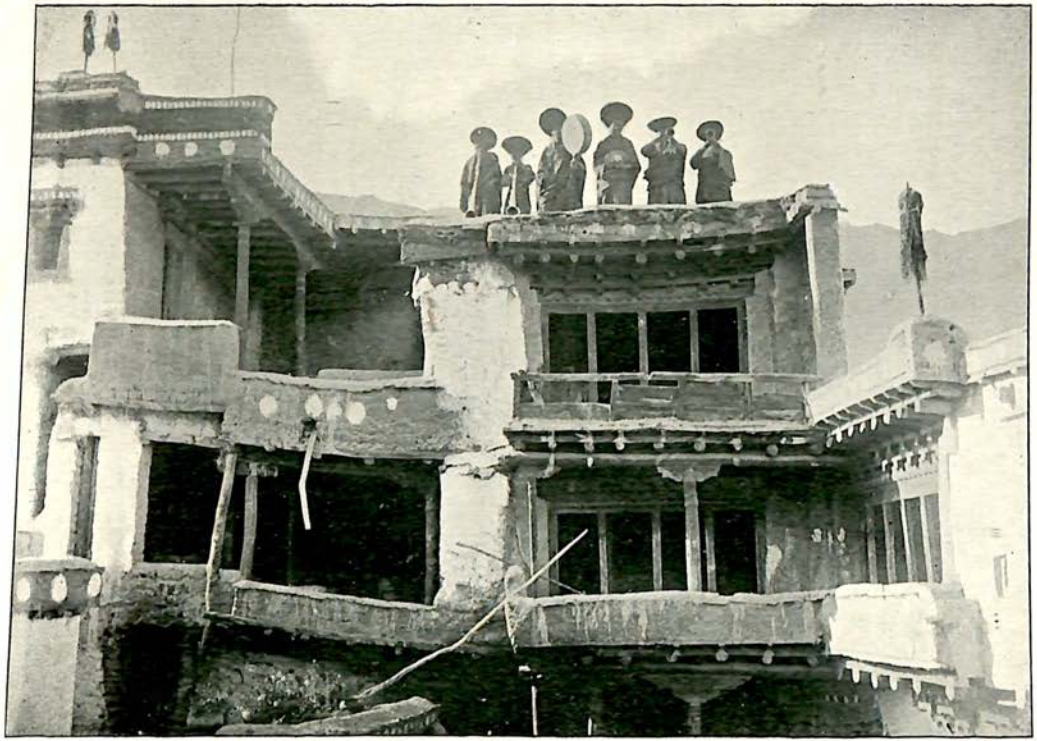
pony. Add to these, traders, footmen armed and unarmed, grooms, and attendants.

Though we had started before dawn, by this time the sun beat down on the sandy plains and black fantastic-shaped rocks of Ladak with the intensity peculiar to elevated regions.

Presently we are among the fields and orchards surrounding the town, and the sight of green things is delightful. We traverse a narrow lane, turn a corner, and pass from the silence of the desert into a street thick with sightseers in all manner of queer and picturesque costumes. Simultaneously the air begins to throb with the deep notes of great trumpets sounded from the monastery above. The air is full of dust. From a group of "red" lamas on a roof proceeds a burst of ecclesiastical music, solemnly discordant. A brass band, the members of which blow wildly into their instruments with no regard to tune, add to the din. The crowd make way, and we are met with a buzz of "*joo joo*" and "*salaam aleikum.*" At the turning into the square a troop of Kashmiri dancing boys, attended by their minstrels, begin to pose. Then by the sarai and the rosy-faced Yarkandis at its gates, down the straight road which borders the Moravian mission enclosure and through the Agency gateway, above which floats the

Union Jack. We are at length in our own garden, and after the glare and dust, how delightful the change was can be left to the imagination. To the lady of our party, anyhow, after the long marches through a barren wilderness of mountains, its cool shade savoured of Elysium.

Our house was built some decades ago by the first Commissioner and celebrated explorer, Ney Elias. The walls were frescoed by lama artists in the brilliant pigments used in Tibetan monasteries. Those in the hall and climbing up the stairs represented the Dogra invasion of Ladak, with elephants, cavalry, and foot-soldiers climbing over the diminutive green and white pyramids which conventionally represented the snow-crested Himalaya; while upstairs the walls of the passages and of the dining-room were done in rectangles, each one depicting a Tibetan fairy tale. The drawing-room was on the upper floor, and commanded from its windows one of those views which always remain in the memory. Looking over the garden and across a wide sandy valley, one saw some five or six miles away and a thousand feet below us the glitter of the Indus meandering in a dark belt of green. Beyond this a superb snowy range, with towering crests 20,000 feet and more in



A welcome from Lamas.

height, rose like a barrier to shut out all outside influence from the small world of Ladak. From here one could see at the bottom of the garden the square platform where the Dogra General, Zorawar Singh, — who afterwards, with his ill-fated army, met a terrible end across the Tibetan border,—received the submission of the Ladaki King, for the house had been built in the old King's garden. At the other end, half hidden in the foliage, a *chorten* gleamed white and mysterious, its shadow, thrown by the morning sun, falling across the little English cemetery. Strange the fate which brought white men's bones to rest in this remote spot. Among them the trader Dalgleish, murdered on the 18,000-feet crest of the wild Kara-Koram, and Stoliczka, one of the best of India's exploring surveyors.

An entertainment was given that night in the Wazarat courtyard, and by the time dinner was over the Sirdar's *Jamadar* had arrived to escort us thither. Muffled in furs we followed him. The streets and bazaars, so crowded with life in the daytime, were now almost deserted. Grotesque shadows, thrown by the Wazir's myrmidons, flickered along the white walls and disappeared into gloomy porches and recesses. Except for occasional lights in latticed windows

of upper storeys, all was darkness. Now and again a warm laden air and the whinny and stamps of mules advised us of the vicinity of a traders' sarai, and peeping into one of them we saw the recumbent figures of muleteers sleeping near their charges, and a group of fur-clad traders sitting over the embers of a fire discussing the day's sales. Dark figures, whose sex it was impossible to guess, now and again flitted across our path and disappeared, and the whole breathed the mystery of an Eastern city at night.

Presently we found ourselves passing through a gateway; trees rose about us, and we inhaled the heavy scent of flowers. Then another gate, and we were in a large courtyard crowded with people of both sexes. The enclosure was lighted up by a huge fire of logs in the centre. Round it a square space formed a stage, of which the audience occupied three sides. On the fourth side was a row of chairs under an awning to which the Wazir ceremoniously conducted us. In front burnt a huge brass seven-branched candlestick, and on the table supporting it were arranged dishes of sweetmeats and, in deference to European taste, a box of Egyptian cigarettes.

The music immediately began. The performers



Chorten, Ladak.

were few, but made up for this by tremendous exertions. The instruments were drums and clarionets, the latter most elaborately made of wood, overlaid with silver and encrusted with turquoises and corals.

The evening's programme began with a Ladaki dance, in which all the performers were of the fair sex. The coryphées, some twenty in number, varied in age from young unmarried girls to agile old dames of sixty and even more. I use the word dance for lack of a better term, but there was little about the performance of what we imagine to have been the art of Terpsichore. The women followed one after another in a circle — a stumble followed by a lurch — the pace gradually increasing till about "two-step" time was reached. The hands, as in all Eastern dances, were continually in motion—usually picking up or proffering flowers, or some such symbolic action. There was also a curious shifting of the cloak from one shoulder to the other, that had, no doubt, some significance. All wore the picturesque national costume, a scarlet cloak lined and edged with white sheepskin, and below divided skirts tucked into long Tibetan boots. At the waist, a large round buckle of silver or brass supported a chatelaine of miscellaneous odds and ends. The head-dress consisted of a long triangular

piece of leather, the point of which fell far down the back. On this a large number of "matrix" turquoises were sewn; the *perak*, as they call it, of a wealthy woman being a mass of blue. Behind the ears big flaps of black furs stood out, giving the wearer a remarkable elephantine appearance. As the dance drew to a close, the audience were staring up into the trees over their heads, where the firelight discovered a large ape, seated among the branches, presently descend for "comic business" among the crowd.

After this, the stage was held by a scarlet-visaged dwarf, who shot up into a geni and swayed about over our heads. Then a sword-dance, always a popular turn in the East. Round and round the dark-robed figures flitted, swords playing like lightning round their heads, slowly at first, then more wildly, till when the utmost pitch of exertion was reached the assembly broke into frantic shouts of "*Barikulla, Barikulla!*"

A fire-dance came next, in which the artist spun a long pole with a torch at either end round his head more and more rapidly till he was encircled by two bright rings of fire.

Between the performances the fire was tended by men with wet cloths round their faces, looking like demons in the ruddy glow. At each

fresh log the fire blazed up with a cloud of sparks, rendering blacker the pitch blackness beyond its range, and making the tiers of strange faces dance in the fitful light.

While these minor items were in progress, one side of the square had filled with the sombre figures of red-robed Lama musicians. They bore trumpets of all sizes, from the huge telescopic tubes of copper which required a boy in front to hold them, to those the size of a huntsman's horn; drums held aloft on broomstick handles, clarionets, cymbals, and many other queer "instruments of musick." From them a quavering, rippling jangle of discords and minors rose, and gradually increased in volume, till the big trumpets joined in with deep, hoarse cacophonous notes. At the same moment hideous masked figures trooped in at a slow run, like great fowls, halted at a drum-beat, flapped their wings, and began the grotesque contortions of the dance of devils. These lama dancers came from the big monastery at Hemi, and the dance shown us was a selection from the three days' religious masque performed there every year.

The serious light in which the Ladaki audience, especially the female part of it, regarded the performance was quite unmistakable, both from their wrapt faces and their reverential attitude,

with hands clasped. The Mahommedan portion of the crowd, on the other hand, though in these parts distinctly latitudinarian, expressed nothing on their faces but indifference. From the performers our looks wandered to the group of shaven lamas standing near the entrance. Their sleek faces had for the moment lost their habitual apathetic expression, and every man was intent on watching the dancers' feet, seemingly to catch them making an incorrect step. For the frenzy and abandon of their leaps and gestures was apparent only, every movement in the dance of devils being actually as rigidly laid down as the evolutions of a well-drilled *corps de ballet.*

After another Ladaki dance, in which men and women, now mildly intoxicated by unlimited potations of *chung*, both joined, the Yarkandi caravan men, of whom there were a good many in the crowd, volunteered a dance. Fine rosy-faced men, with splendid physique. Attired as if for the road to-morrow—their normal condition —in fur cap, sheepskin cloak, and high boots, even to the whip stuck in their belts, a party trooped on and lurched round in an ungainly but rhythmical dance, and being encouraged by the loud shouts from their comrades, kept it up till pushed aside to make way for the big turn.

A gorgeously-dressed mandarin straddles on

—the wider the legs the greater the dignity—accompanied by obsequious retainers: and a good deal of excited conversation, all in Tibetan, results in the despatch of a *billet-doux*. After some impatient waiting, a blaze of lights in a dark glade the other end of the garden announces the arrival of the princess. The lady is seated in a boat hung about with lanterns; or to be more accurate, the boat is attached to her—or him, for the part is taken by a much painted and bedizened young man. The slow approach of the vessel is heralded by the most frantic efforts on the part of the band. The drummers wind themselves up to a pitch of exertion that must make their arms stiff for days, while on the "wood" side the screaming clarionets are vehemently waved up and down in the act of playing. The crew of the boat walk outside, punting vigorously along with poles; but this lapse from the realistic does not at all affect the uproarious enthusiasm with which the princess is received by the crowd.

For our part, we cannot but wonder what enterprising troupe of strolling players first brought this new and original nautical comedy, with its Chinese setting, from its birthplace in the Far East to this remote spot in the heart of the continent, or what scene in history it represents.

It may be we have before us nothing less than the arrival of Cocachin, the fair lady of Cathay, sent with Marco Polo to be the Persian king's bride.

The princess is received by the mandarin with great state and ceremony, but his advances in the *rôle* of lover are repulsed. After much "business" she re-embarks and orders her mariners to take her home. On the voyage a storm arises, and in spite of the strenuous efforts of the crew the ship runs aground, and the princess is in dire peril. The *deus ex machinâ* arrives in the shape of the despised suitor, who effects a rescue. A reconciliation takes place, the now lovers light each other's opium pipes, and the scene ends in the triumphant exit of all.

It was now late and we took our leave, the Wazir escorting us to the end of the garden; and so home through the deserted streets. The dub-dub of the unwearying drums, however, continued for long after, showing us the Wazir's "At Home" was still going on.


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ROYAL ASIATIC

II.

What Port Said is to the Suez Canal, Leh is to the Central Asian Trade Road. The busy season is in the summer, when the high passes to North and South are "open." The rows of shops in the streets and bazaars, which stand with closed doors during the winter months, are then open and glowing with Eastern wares.

Twice a-week during the season the main street is cleared of its busy crowd and the polo players have it to themselves. Up and down they career with wild yells, urging their shaggy ponies with whip and heel. The heavy ball of willow wood flies into the shop windows and on to the roofs of the houses, both crowded with spectators; but here plate glass is unknown and heads are hard, so what matter!

At this time the caravan-sarais are full of merchants and their goods. A visitor on entering one of these is struck by a peculiar aromatic odour, due to piled-up bales of the drug known as *charas*, the chief import from Chinese Turkestan. Though dealings in any intoxicating drug—and this form of hemp is beyond all others harmful—is forbidden to the Prophet's followers, but few of the trading community resist the temptation of engaging in the

lucrative trade. In these days *charas* is a less profitable article to deal in than it was, owing to a heavy duty having been imposed on its importation into India, a measure which, however unpalatable to the traders of Ladak, was certainly sound; for, in addition to countless other evils for which the *charas* habit is responsible, not a few of the fanatical murders which take place in northern India may be traced to its use.[1]

The sarais generally consist of two quadrangular courtyards. The outer one has stables all round for baggage animals, for the whole of the trade is by pack transport; while the inner one, for the traders themselves, is enclosed by double-storeyed buildings with verandahs. The inmates wear the garb of Central Asia, voluminous wadded cloaks tied in at the waist with a cotton girdle. On their feet are long riding-boots, much crinkled at the ankle,—the more usual kind being those which have a detachable slipper for outdoors; and the advantages of such a footgear in a cold country, where etiquette forbids the wearing of boots on a carpet,

[1] Many of the *charas* traders belong to the queer sect of Maulais, whose tenets allow the use of intoxicants. By a curious coincidence these people are to-day's representatives of the Haschishins (or eaters of the hemp compound, Haschish), who were famous in history as the "assassins," and originated the word. They were the followers of the Sheikh-ul-Jabal, or "Old Man of the Mountains," a name of terror at the time of the Crusades, from his methods of secret assassination.

are obvious. The bronzed and weather-beaten faces of these big bearded men testify to the hardships of their lives. One cannot but feel some admiration for a man who goes quietly off with his caravan on journeys lasting for months in the wilds of Central Asia, his start attended with as little ado as that of a business man to the City. That red-faced individual in the otter-skin cap is the latest arrival from "the North," and as such is being entertained by the Aksakal in his own verandah. As they sit confabulating over their tea, one is brought face to face with Sadi's tiresome acquaintance in the "Island of Kish," who kept the poet awake listening to his projects:—

"So and so is my partner in Turkestan, and I have such and such merchandise in Hindustan, and this is the title-deed for such and such lands and for such and such property, and so and so is security. Oh, Sadi! I have one more journey before me: if that be accomplished I will settle down in retirement for the rest of my life. I shall take Persian sulphur to China, for I hear it has great value, thence I shall bring China ware to Greece, and Grecian brocade to India, and Indian steel to Aleppo, and mirrors of Aleppo to Yaman, and striped stuff of Yaman to Persia: after that I shall give up journeying."

The interchange of goods between India and

Chinese Turkestan, over the stupendous mountain-ranges that separate the two, indeed demands born traders such as Sadi's friend of Kish.

The "caravan-bashis" have their own theories as to equine management. The most indigestible of all foods, uncrushed barley, is given so that it may remain in the animal's stomach "to comfort him" as long as possible. Then on arriving at camp after a hard march, ponies' heads are tied up for an hour or so before they are fed or turned loose to pick up whatever grazing there may be. The theory is that a tired animal, if allowed to eat directly his load is taken off, will just satisfy the pangs of hunger and then go to sleep till morning, when he will be hungry and unfit for a fresh day's toil. But if his head is tied for a couple of hours on arrival, he will sleep at once and afterwards spend the night grazing, and so be ready to march next morning with a full stomach! Let veterinarians smile; I for one think that the probability is that these travellers born and bred know their own business best. The handiest animal for this sort of work is, as usual, the mule. An excellent type of this quadruped comes from Ush Turfan in Chinese Turkestan, and whilst in Leh, the writer had a commission to buy up as many as possible for the Indian Government, both for mountain batteries and transport.

These mule-buying days used always to attract

a great concourse of people to the polo ground. My wife and I had our seats under an awning, and by our sides on a carpet sat a Committee of reputable traders. After measuring height and girth and trotting up and down for soundness—for an animal could not have much wrong with him if he trotted sound after a march from Yarkand—the Committee would assemble to assess values. The way this was done would be as mysterious to one unversed in the Eastern art of *dallali* as the operations of a modern thought-reader. The owner of the animal would join hands with each one of the Committee in turn, the clasped hands being in each case concealed in voluminous sleeves.[1] Emotions would then be seen to pass over the faces of the bargainers,—engaging candour, surprise, anger, encouragement, pitying contempt,—like clouds on an April sky. Then they would drop hands and the same operation would be gone through with some one else. After five minutes, the chief of the Committee might announce the result of the dumb agreement: "Your honour, this man has less sense than his mule. We are all agreed that the animal is not worth more than three hundred and fifty rupees, but he says he will not take one rupee less than four hundred and fifty."

"Protector of the Universe," would interrupt the

[1] The bargaining is done by the extension of the fingers of the hand.

owner in a confidential tone of voice, "How could I sell him for less than what I paid in Yarkand, after bringing him all this way unladen in order that he might be fit to carry the guns of the most high Government to Kabul?" And so the argument would proceed.

After the purchase had been completed, the mules used to be branded on the hoof, an operation to which some of them had the very strongest objections. One such mule lives in my recollection, a big brown beast, nearly fifteen hands high. He had defied all endeavours to bring him to the brander, and had several times broken loose and careered all over the town. Finally, Nasr Shah, a Lhasa trader, sent for one of his Tibetan muleteers, a giant from Kam, with an enormous head and a pair of shoulders and jaw that looked like a prize-fighter's. Seizing the end of the leading rope, in spite of all efforts to break away on the part of the mule, he drew himself nearer and nearer, till with a sudden bound he seized the animal's ear. A tremendous struggle ensued, but the Tibetan's grasp never relaxed, and finally, by sheer strength he conquered, and led the beast like a lamb.

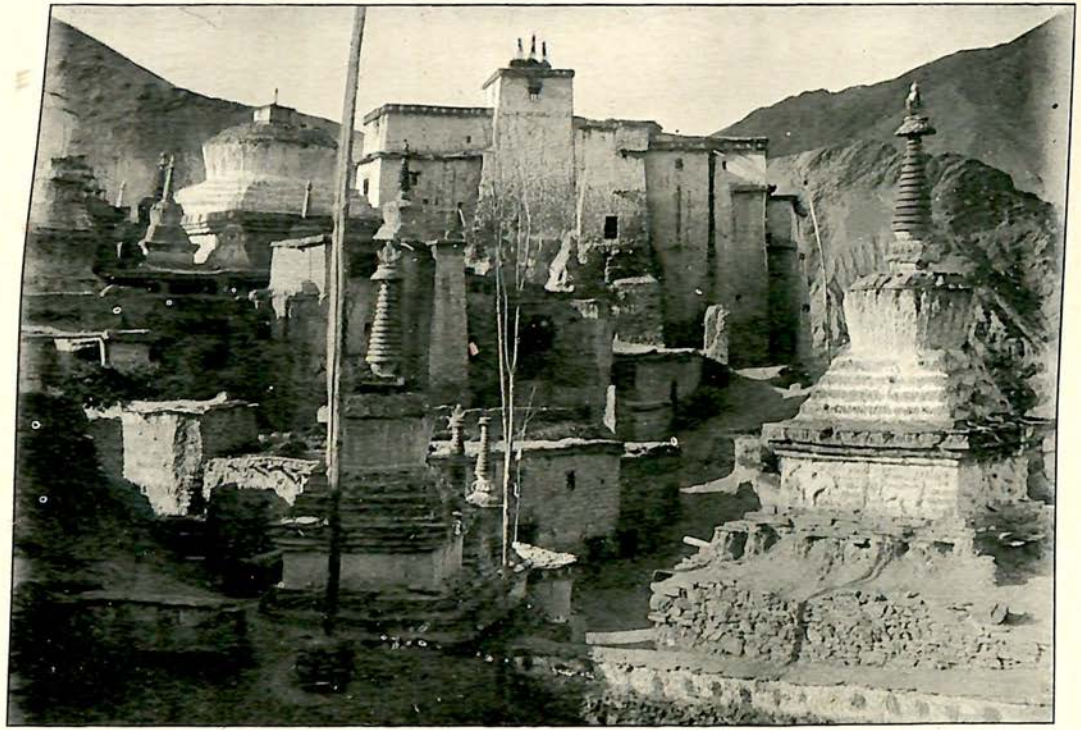
Nasr Shah was the principal trader with Lhasa, and with his sons still remains one of the very few Mahommedans who have the right of entry

there. His eldest son had that year been made head of the Kashmir State Mission to Lhasa, known as the Lapchak, whose return, a few weeks after our arrival in Leh, was one of the events of the year. We went to see his warehouses at the time his Tibetan goods were being unpacked. The pillared rooms were pervaded by a scent of musk, the most valuable product of Tibet, that was almost overpowering. If one was not aware of the scientific fact that the most delicate odours become nauseating, and conversely the most disagreeable ones sweet, when taken in large doses, one might have wondered how "musk and ambergris" became the synonym all over the Eastern world for everything delicious.

Other bales were full of Chinese silks. There were chests of "brick" tea from the same country, rectangular slabs weighing eight pounds each, the best of which fetched as much as four shillings a pound, and is preferred in Central Asia to the best products of Indian gardens. Nasr Shah's costliest goods came packed in wooden chests, over which raw hides had been sewn and allowed to shrink. When the skins were cut off the boxes tumbled to pieces, but as they had survived over a thousand miles of mule transport, the packing could not be considered bad. Some contained parcels of turquoise in the matrix, the most

fashionable form of jewellery among Ladaki ladies. Others, the first view of which had been the principal object of our visit, contained Tibetan antiques, mostly teapots, huge in size and of extraordinary design, in silver, copper, or brass inlaid with the precious metal, and in wood. There were quaintly-designed pipes, some of which were fashioned out of antelope horns and mounted with silver and turquoise, *chang* jugs, drinking bowls, and personal ornaments. But in Tibet, as in Europe in the dark ages, art seems mostly to have found expression in the adornment of ecclesiastical buildings, and in the production of images, pictures, and vessels used in worship.

I suppose there is no country in the world where religion is so prominent a feature as in Ladak and Tibet, where the monasteries form a more conspicuous landmark than church spires at home. Wherever there is a village, and often where there is not, in remote and desolate places, the eye is drawn to white cubical piles perched up on precipitous crags. From below, the imagination is caught by their massive sloping walls, the yak's-tail banners, and the black figures of monks silhouetted against the sky, while the swell of musical instruments that now and again floats down from these high places awakes conceptions of exalted worship. A closer view of course



Monastery, Ladak.

results in some disillusionment. The buildings that looked ethereal from below are, in fact, reeking with dirt; the monks, or at least most of them, not sad-faced ascetics, but carnal-looking priests, and their religion far removed from the pure teaching of Buddha.

But it is far from the case that a visit to a Tibetan monastery results in disappointment: indeed the most casual visitor cannot fail to be struck by its strangeness. The maze of passages, stairways, and cubicles; the grotesque pictures; the queer-shaped vessels and appliances; the gorgeous vestments; the libraries, treasure and image houses; the pungent odours of lamps and joss-sticks; the dark-robed men themselves, whose lives are bound up in the swarming ant-hill of worship. One passes through dark galleries, thronged with seated images whose presence is more felt than seen. In the mysterious, dimly-lighted temples the bare feet of attendant lamas awake no sound on the polished stone, and the clack of boot-heels seems strangely out of place. Carved pillars stand up, their capitals invisible in the obscurity above. One is aware of grotesquely frescoed walls and worked banners of colours now toned down by great age. From recesses in the walls the eye catches the dull gleam of copper and silver vessels. In front, before the carved

altar, lamps burn dimly and but faintly illumine the jewel-decked figure of the great silver Tsong Kapa. Here is that gloom

> Within the inner altar niche
> Whose dimness worship has made rich.

Ladak is likewise a country of festivals. Religious ceremonies of all sorts may be numbered by the score, for the Buddhist hierarchy well understand the value of pageantry for attracting the people. One of the quaintest of the latter kind was seen by the writer at the village of Sheh, to which a huge holiday crowd of pleasure-loving Ladakis had been drawn; the scene, with the women's scarlet cloaks and turquoise *peraks* under the bright sky of Ladak, being most picturesque. One feature was the exorcism of a monster dragon, which, with snapping jaws, crawled round the grass plot in front of the monastery, and in realism would not have discredited Drury Lane Theatre. The charm was worked by lamas, who preceded him, waving branches of willow and burning juniper. The chief excitement, however, was afforded by an individual of the village, who, on this particular day of the year, became "possessed." Dressed in robes of red silk, with a mitre on his head, he suddenly issued from a cell in the monastery,



Lama dancers.



Mural prayer-cylinders.

and, surrounded by lamas with smoking censers, rushed wildly through the crowd uttering Sibylline prophecies. He then mounted the steps of the monastery. This edifice was on a high crag, the escarpment of the perpendicular rock being continued without a break by the monastery wall to a dizzy height. On its summit was believed to dwell a *Lha*, one of those spirits that live on the high peaks above the clouds, but sometimes descend to the habitations of men. From the steps, the madman leapt on to the monastery wall, which ascended to the topmost tower. The band played deafeningly. Higher and higher he went, till, just before he reached the summit, the music stopped, and there was a hush over the crowd. Irresistibly my mind fled back. I was again in a London "Hall," and it was the moment before the high dive! The madman disappeared behind a corner. Then a dark figure became visible on the giddy summit, and, without pause or falter, passed on. The *Lha* had protected his own. Then the people yelled,—the band filled their lungs with air,—and in another minute he was descended among the people, had burst through them, and was once more immured in his cell.

In this country of delightful incongruities, even officialdom makes a concession to the spirit of the people. Have I not seen with mine own eyes

a birthday parade when the troops, who marched by the ruling chief's portrait, were preceded by a troop of dancing girls! Think of that, ye utilitarian and kharki-clad warriors!

To those, in short, who are tired of civilisation, of "presenting their compliments and requesting the honour and much regretting, of being pinioned at dinner-tables, stuck-up in ballrooms, or cruelly planted in pews," I would point to Ladak as the place that affords "complete rest and change."


ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY LIBRARY



A burhel head.

A DAY AFTER BURHEL.

FATE had ordained that I should find myself in the *rôle* of an "engineer" (as the term is used in the East) in charge of one of the most difficult mountain roads in the world; for the track running from Kashmir through the Kara-Koram Mountains to Chinese Turkestan is certainly that, and is probably the most formidable road in all "the seven climes" that is regularly used for trade. Thus, instead of my days being occupied among the typical surroundings of *kutcherris*[1] and clubs, dusty offices and not less dusty polo-grounds, durbars, dinners, and the usual Indian round of work and play, I had tasks such as cutting a passable track over a glacier, building a ferry-boat fit to carry traders and their goods across the tumultuous waters of a mountain river, blasting a path along the side of a precipice. I considered myself fortunate, for in the important matter of play were there not the finest stalking

[1] *Kutcherris* = law-courts.

grounds in the world before my camp, almost wherever I chose to pitch it?

On this particular occasion my camp was at a desolate spot called Tuti Ailak, midway between two works then in progress. One was the cutting of a road along the Talambuti ravine, which was to turn the very trying ascent of the Karawal Dawan; the other was concerned with the track that has to be maintained during the summer over the big Sasser glacier to the north. Incidentally it was in the middle of very good burhel country.

That Thursday morning in August, as, accompanied by Siring Namgyal, I started from camp in the cold half-light of a morning in the mountains for a day after the wild sheep, I felt a special indebtedness to my lucky star that I was not employing the beginning of my week's holiday—like many poor devils in India—in a vain attempt to recapture the sleep that will not stay after its wonted hour.

After going for something under an hour, we sat down to spy with our backs against a detached rock as big as a cottage. That is the advantage of having your camp very high. Burhel generally live at an elevation of 15,000 to 18,000 feet in the summer, and it is a terrible thing to begin your day with a stiff three or four

thousand feet climb before beginning to spy. To paraphrase John Bunyan, "He that is high need fear no climb"; and that should be laid to heart by the burhel hunter. The upper slopes below the permanent snow-line were brightening yellow under the sun, which was what we wanted; for without the sun's rays to throw objects into relief burhel are most difficult to pick up. This, of course, is true of most mountain game.

Siring Namgyal, my stalker, was a pig-tailed Ladaki, who, like most of his countrymen, professed the religion of Bhudda. I may say, without fear of contradiction, that his face would have attracted attention anywhere. Smiling, wrinkled and ugly, it had something in it which reminded one at once of a gargoyle and a faun. The oddity of his physiognomy was heightened by his black lambskin cap, with flaps intended to keep the ears warm, now turned up like horns. His squat figure I had never seen otherwise than enveloped in a dirty sheepskin cloak held in at the waist with a girdle forming above a pouch which held, next his own skin, a varied assortment of useful things, — his wooden drinking-cup, a ball of *tsampo*,[1] an image-box, his *chakmak*,[2] and other odds and ends. But these were not its only uses,—I have seen produced from this seemingly

[1] *Tsampo* = barley-meal.

[2] *Chakmak* = flint and steel.

bottomless receptacle a dead hare and a live fowl. As he often acted as my guide, I had frequent occasion to examine his back, where my eyes were invariably attracted to a dark triangular mark starting from where his collar might have been and reaching to the middle of his back, the origin of which puzzled me till I noticed that it coincided with the oscillations of his pigtail! No description could give my readers a correct idea of Siring Namgyal's personality without a reference to his aroma, which was very markedly that of the *genus homo* (unwashed) plus that of *chang*, a barley beer of which he was very fond. For all his grotesqueness, the little twinkling eyes that looked out of slits in the puckered yellow face of my shikari were honest little eyes and those of a right good sportsman.

After we had been looking with our glasses for a few minutes, Siring Namgyal got quietly up and, taking my rifle, went round the rock under cover, struck an attitude, and began slowly to revolve. One hand was on his hip, the other outstretched, holding the rifle with a triumphant gesture. A beatific smile was on his face. Sure enough he was dancing, and what was more I knew he had seen burhel, for one of the peculiarities of this little hunter was that when anything occurred to please him nothing could prevent him from

executing a *pas* on the spot. After a minute he rejoined me, where I was vainly trying to pick up the herd, and showed me where to look.

I saw a ram standing up, then another beast lying down, then another, and another, and the longer I looked the more animals I saw. It was a big herd of fifteen or more. They were amongst a tumbled mass of rock *débris* at the bottom of a grey cliff of rock, a kind of ground on which burhel are almost invisible. The appearance of a burhel dead, or in unnatural surroundings such as zoological gardens, conveys no idea how these beasts are protected by their strongly marked colouring of slaty blue or brown, black and white. They just lose themselves on suitable ground, and the most suitable of all is the long slopes of grey boulders so common in the higher Himalaya. Against this background, even their dark olive-coloured horns seem expressly designed by Nature to imitate the black interstices of the boulders.

The stalk looked simple, as a ravine ran right up close by the herd. So we started and climbed steadily to our point, which was reached in something over an hour and a half. Here we found that the herd had moved, and were now well out of shot and the space intervening too open for a stalk. An examination of the ground, with due regard to the wind, which was in our faces, showed

that they were quite safe as far as we were concerned if they stopped where they were. We decided to wait, and this apparently was also the idea of the sheep, as one by one they began to lie down. I number burhel among the sheep rather than among the goats, firstly, because their habits are like those of other breeds of wild sheep, secondly, because they are excellent mutton. Scientifically speaking, they form a link between the two, having certain characteristics of both which may be ascertained from any work on the subject.

The long glasses brought them up to within a little over a hundred yards. How jolly they looked, as unconscious of danger they composed themselves for rest or moved about nibbling the dry summer grass, and what a picture the scene would have made if transferred to canvas—wildest nature and nature's wildest children!

And why, wretched man, crouching behind that boulder, wish to disturb the peace of the mountain with your diabolical weapons and evil explosives?

I imagine at times this thought must in one form or another visit most sportsmen, and I imagine also that most of us as we grow older find the question harder and harder to answer to our satisfaction. Answers of course there are, both logical and scientific, but none the less the civilised man with his twentieth century con-

science going further than Iago, who held it "very stuff o' the conscience to do no murder," is beginning to feel a certain repugnance to taking life of any kind.

But suchlike heretical thoughts, however much they may hover about the remoter recesses of the brain — and even at times be admitted by the keenest of sportsmen—are not those that occur at the juncture we have reached this day after burhel. You gaze at the old warrior of the herd, so distant, so wary; you think—almost with resentment — of his extraordinary cuteness, of all the mishaps that may befall, the odds against you. And even when you finally draw a bead on him, may not the bullet go wide? No: at this time the end seems too far for one to be conscious of anything but the overwhelming desire of the hunter. A base and elementary instinct, perhaps, but we deal with facts.

I soon knew each ram by sight, and had set my desires on a heavy beast with a magnificent pair of horns. A burhel's head, it may be noted, is by no means an easy thing to judge quickly or at a distance, owing to the horns curving in two planes. You look at the twin arches from in front, but you cannot at the same time see the terminal curve backwards; while from a side view it is the latter only that can be seen.

How did we spend the long hours that intervened between our morning's climb and the next scene in the drama, not enacted till the sun had long begun to slope westward? The view—a sea of tossing white-crested mountains, the near ones full of black-and-white contrasts, fading gradually into the dim blue battlements at the horizon; desultory scraps of talk; lunch—tobacco unfortunately no temptation at that altitude. At one time an eagle came to the rescue. We had first heard the singing of the wind in his feathers as he moved across the sky high above us. As he played with the current of air, each of the strong terminal feathers of his great wings and tail seemed, as I watched him through the glasses, to have its independent duty. Would man's ingenuity even in cycles of years produce anything to compare with Nature's perfected aeroplane, in the evolution of which countless years and unlimited material had been expended? The problem was still unsolved when he sailed away out of sight.

Far below us a dark thread winds slowly along the sinuous valley. It is a party of traders returning to Yarkand with their caravan of Indian goods. It is a queer instinct which drives these people year after year to far Indian seaports—an infinity of pains and little profit,—scarcely

less strange it seemed to me than the migration of birds.

These men had left Yarkand in the spring, with a caravan of *charas* and silk. Their first difficulty was the Kilian Pass, 16,500 feet; at Shahidulla the last Chinese habitations were left behind, and the little party were engulfed in the uninhabited labyrinth of the ranges. After crossing the barren Dipsang plains and the Suchet and Kara-Koram Passes, both over 18,000 feet high, they had before them the two crossings of the Shyok river, with the dreaded Sasser Pass (17,000 feet) and the Karawal Dawan in between. The passage of the Shyok river—in the early summer a tumbling flood of brown glacier water —itself provides sufficient sensation, of a kind the traders would gladly be without. The passengers and their merchandise — in some cases comprising all their worldly goods—are put aboard a flat-bottomed ferry-boat and rowed desperately across the river. During the early summer the question of crossing or waiting for a diminution of the flood is often one for anxious debate. The baggage animals are made to swim, being stripped and driven in a herd into the tossing waters. It is a sight to see the river dotted over with ponies' heads, all being carried down stream at a terrible rate and seemingly bound for destruc-

tion. Most of them land, however, one side or the other, in the space of a mile or two—generally, strange to say, none the worse. Next comes the Khardong Pass, 17,000 feet, for which (their own animals being used up) yaks are generally hired; and so our party of traders arrive at Leh, 455 miles from their starting point. Here they leave their animals to fatten up—and by then, poor beasts, they need it—for the return journey. The road on to Kashmir is another 250 miles, in which one severe, and two minor passes have to be crossed. Thence some ten days with wheeled transport takes them to the rail-head, and in two or three more days they arrive at the port which is the goal of their journey. Then, purchases hurriedly completed, back they have to toil before the passes get blocked by snow. I often wondered what the City man, accustomed to his saloon carriage to London Bridge or King's Cross, would say to such a journey on business!

The string of ponies toiling painfully along below us was one of these returning caravans. I had met the traders the day before at my camp, and they had expressed their thanks to the high "Sarkar" for the improvements to the trade road and the new ferry-boat, in which they had had a good passage across the Shyok.

The former reference was to the cutting, then in progress, along the precipitous side of the Talambuti gorge, by which the much-dreaded ascent of the Karawal Dawan was avoided—a terrible stony hill this, the severity of which to tired animals is testified to by the bleaching bones with which the track is littered. Some work still remained on the cutting, and the frequent boom of blasting operations reached us where we sat. As for the crossing of the Shyok, the traders could scarcely have said more if they had just completed a passage in the *Lusitania*, which shows how entirely a matter of expectations is gratitude. How the passengers of the famous liner would grouse if they were landed some hours late of the usual time; and here these poor devils were overwhelmed with joy at finding themselves with bag and baggage safely across the Shyok.

I seem to have left our burhel. Let us return to them. About three in the afternoon they began to move slowly in our direction; half an hour later it seemed long odds that they would walk straight up to me without giving me the trouble of moving. But no reliance can be placed on wild sheep, as had been impressed on me only the week before. It was like this. I had stalked a herd which, after giving me a climb

over 2000 feet of boulders, for no apparent reason shifted their ground. As

> the wise hares
> Oft quit their seats, lest some more curious eye
> Should mark their haunts, and by dark treach'rous wiles
> Plot their destruction,

so the not less "wise" burhel; and they repeated the manœuvre on my making a second attempt. This time they lay down behind a ridge that seemed made for a stalk. Climbing over boulders under a hot sun at a great elevation is gruelling work, but the wind was fair, and I had every reason to think that my toil would be rewarded. But the spirits of the mountains were against me. I crawled the last few yards and looked over. But as I—with the utmost caution—raised my head, so simultaneously did every animal in that herd spring to his feet and dash down the mountain-side, that I had a sort of uncanny feeling that they had been forewarned, and were all lying with their eyes fixed on the ridge waiting for the moment that a human head should slowly appear before vanishing in a cloud of dust.

I therefore trusted burhel to do nothing but the unexpected. What happened now was that they walked straight up to within a hundred and fifty yards of where I was lying, rifle in hand. They probably would have come nearer,

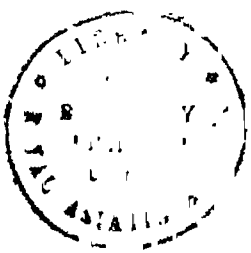
but seeing my ram standing broadside on, I could bear the strain no longer and pulled the trigger. Once more the unexpected! Every beast in the herd was off—including my ram! In less time than it takes to write, nothing was left but some dust hanging in the air and two disgusted men staring at it.

Siring Namgyal and I went to the spot where but a minute before that ram had stood and offered as perfect a target as could be imagined. No blood. The shikari said a miss, but I would not hear of it. We followed the tracks a couple of hundred yards. Still no blood, and the horrid conviction that I had missed an easy shot slowly gained ground and had me in its grasp. Is there anything in the realm of sport that casts such a dismal blackness on the soul as a hopeless, inexcusable miss? I went back to the spot to see if any hairs cut by the bullet had fallen—sometimes a better indication than blood,—leaving Siring Namgyal to follow the tracks a little farther.

Yes; a few grey hairs showed a hit or a graze—probably the latter. The shikari was busy tracking a long way on by now. But see, what on earth is he doing? I raise my glasses. On a ridge line silhouetted against the sky, one arm thrown out in a triumphant gesture, the other

on his hip, Siring Namgyal is slowly gyrating. Hooray! There is no mistaking what that means. Never, to my eyes at least, had he looked so beautiful!

When I got to the spot, the ram was lying dead at the bottom of a ravine. The bullet had got him a hand's-breadth too far back.





Dead burhel.

THE FATHER OF ALL SHEEP.

I HAD pitched my tent one evening at one of the numerous places called Kyangma Chumik, a spring near the Tibetan border beyond Hanle. It was as dreary and barren a spot as one could find anywhere on the rolling uplands of "the great Chang." But for the patch of green grass round the little pool of water which gave the place its name—Kyang's spring,—nothing met the eye but a waste of round, sterile hills and sandy valleys stretching away to the horizon. Above the low line of purple hills to the west lay a bank of dark clouds, from behind which a shaft of light struck up into the rosy sky. The evening was intensely still, but so rare the air, that as I sat watching the tail of my little caravan come in, the shouts of the yak drivers scarcely brought with them an answering echo.

Kyang, the Central Asian wild ass,—handsome beasts that looked like big, well-groomed mules, of a bright chestnut colour and in splendid con-

dition,—were visible in the distance. My camp was at the very spot where "the wild asses quench their thirst," so the large numbers were probably due to this being the only water in the neighbourhood, and the time that for their evening drink.

I was after *Ovis ammon*, the beast whom Kingsley termed "the father of all the flocks on earth." And if the title is not his by right, he certainly deserves it by courtesy, for in size and wariness he surpasses all breeds of wild sheep, and seems to have at his disposal the accumulated experience and protective instincts of numberless generations; so that he who has fairly stalked and shot an old *ammon* ram may truly be said to have gained the blue ribbon of big game hunting.

I had been for some days on ground where I might find the sheep, and though I had come on several lots of ewes, I had seen nothing of rams but their tracks. My stalker was Siring Namgyal of the ugly countenance, on whose face it would be as difficult to discover a space without wrinkles as on the horn of the sheep we were after. He was a good hunter, however, and when once I had got accustomed to a somewhat marked aroma, and had allowed him to exhaust the tales of his domestic quarrels—he, with two other brothers, after the custom of Ladak, had joint

interest in one wife—I found him quite an interesting companion.

Next morning, breakfast was eaten by candle-light, and we moved out of camp as the first glimmer of light flickered over the sky. We were accompanied by another Ladaki of Hanle, who acted as guide and led the way. Of course we were all riding,—sitting on ponies would be a more correct phrase,—for in a country where the lowest valley elevations are over 14,000 feet above sea-level, any form of conveyance seems preferable to one's own legs. Our road lay over a low pass towards which we moved in single file through the gloom like ghostly shadows; though the thuds of Siring Namgyal's heels on his sleepy pony's sides had a distinctly material sound about them. We reached the top of the pass as the surrounding blur of mountains began to assume shape,—though still dark and colourless. Waiting there till we could use our glasses, we watched the grey sky become blue, the dark wisps of cloud on the horizon flush to pink and then whiten; and sand, rocks, and mountains draw their own tints from the light of day. Below us, in the valley, dark amorphous patches turned into green grass, and on them some moving animals suddenly stood out sharp and clear, though mere specks in the distance.

"Kyang," murmured the shikari before I had even time to turn my glasses on them. No other living animal was in sight, so catching hold of our ponies, who had taken the opportunity of going to sleep, we walked down the far slope, and at the bottom mounted and pursued our way. Presently the sun sprang up and the warmth was pleasant. Now and then a big woolly Tibetan hare would jump up from under our ponies' feet and go away with the gait peculiar to the species of the two lollops and a bound, the latter a leap with hind legs trailing.

Not infrequently a shrill gallery whistle, "teee," "teee," "teee," would make us look about, and some slight movement would attract the eye to an upright piece of sandstone, which inspection showed to be a golden-coloured marmot, sitting over his burrow and pretending it was not he that whistled. Queer little beasts, found in queer outlandish spots, no wonder legend has clustered about them; not the least entertaining being that recorded by Herodotus of the gold-digging ants.[1]

[1] "In this desert, then," writes the veracious historian, "and in the sand, there are ants in size not so big as dogs but larger than foxes. These ants, forming their dwellings under ground, heap up the sand as the ants in Greece do, and in the same manner, and are like them in shape. The sand which they cast

Indeed, in spite of the barrenness of the earth's surface in these parts, there is no dearth of animal life. Our ponies were constantly stumbling over the holes of the tailless Tibetan vole, bright-eyed little rodents, whose confiding nature almost ruined the character of a retriever pup I took with me on the march. Their holes went no distance into the ground, and our ponies' feet constantly broke through, exposing to view piles of dry herbs neatly stowed away—signs, according to local lore, of an early snowfall. Kyang, of course, were always a feature of the landscape, and many a time did their appearance on a distant skyline make us slip off our ponies, only to climb back discontentedly when the glasses revealed their true nature.

up is mixed with gold. The Indians, therefore, go to the desert to get this sand, each man having three camels. When the Indians arrive at the spot they fill their sacks with the sand and return home with all possible speed. For the ants having readily detected them by the smell, pursue them, and as they are the swiftest of all animals, not one of the Indians could escape except by getting the start while the ants were assembling."

M'Crindle identifies the ants with Tibetan miners, but it seems much more probable that Tibetan men gave origin to one part of the yarn, and marmots to another. The belief, however, in the existence of gold-digging ants was so prevalent among the ancients that it seems probable that Solomon, who was not altogether innocent of the *auri fames*, in his well-known injunction to the sluggard, really referred to them. The speculation, however, has nothing to do with *Ovis ammon*.

Now and again the faint but thrilling note of wild geese reached us, and looking up we would see high in the heavens the V-shaped skein winging its way south from the lakes of Central Asia to warmer climes. Once, as we rounded a corner, we came on a big animal that was not a kyang; but the excitement dropped at once to zero, for it was only a female *ammon*. Getting nearer, we expected to see her dash off, for there is no shyer beast on God's earth; but she allowed us within ten yards before cantering slowly off. She must either have been ill or guessed she was safe. Siring Namgyal was extremely vexed at my not taking the "chance" so providentially offered, and declared we should have no luck; but the murder was out of the question, and anyhow luck could not be any worse than what we had been having. Shikaris all over the Himalayas are great believers in sequences, and if one has had no luck on starting a trip, they implore one to kill something, if only a purchased sheep, to break the spell. I would not swear that a hankering after meat has nothing to say to it, yet I am sure that superstition has a great deal more.

On and on we went, little dots crawling over the vast expanse of desert. The sun got high in the heavens and struck down through the

thin air with great force, raising a quivering mirage over the plain.

It was about one in the afternoon when we began to ascend the gentle slope of a big round hill, from the top of which we hoped to get an extensive view. Our ponies wearily dragged themselves to the top, and leaving them standing with heaving flanks, we sat down to examine the view, and lunch. The prospect was similar to that we had been seeing all the morning, and indeed for days past. In front, a great wide trough separated us from the next swelling earth-wave, the colour shading from the green of the bottom to the brown of the burtza-covered slopes and the yellows of sandy tracts and stones. Beyond this, more earth-waves, stretching away to infinity. The prevailing impression was remoteness and loneliness — "So lonely 'twas that God Himself scarce seemèd there to be." I will confess my own examination did not take long. I had in truth become a little disgusted at the fruitlessness of our search, so I left the shikari straining his eyes over the plain; and after untying my lunch canteen and water-bottle from the saddle, selected a soft spot among the stones and sat down under the shade of my kharki umbrella. Cold mutton and *chupattis* did not tempt me to linger over the meal, and the last thing I saw before my head began to nod and my

thoughts went drifting, was Siring Namgyal taking alternate bites from his ball of *tsampo* and looks through his telescope.

A touch aroused me, and I saw the shikari standing over me, his face wrinkled and distorted in a way I recognised as indicative of extreme delight.

"Abdus amarn!" he whispered. This was his best attempt at *Ovis ammon*, a name he must have heard used by some previous traveller to indicate the big sheep!

Far away, a faint irregularity of rather darker colour than the rest of the ground was visible with the binoculars. This the big spying-glass resolved into a herd of eight *ammon* rams, lying down, heads all facing up wind. Siring Namgyal had seen one of them standing, which had since lain down, and this had betrayed the herd; otherwise he might never have distinguished them from stones, and we might have returned to camp convinced that there was "not an *ammon* in the whole country."

Leaving the ponies with the guide, we started on the stalk. Half a mile away to the left some undulating ground gave hope of cover, but after reaching it we found it would only bring us a part of the way to our beasts, and from there onward the ground was so level and the undulations so gentle that we had to proceed doubled up. Hard

work this at any time, but at 15,000 feet words fail! In this manœuvre the shikari's shorter stature gave him some advantage, not to speak of his lungs, which had never known what it was to breathe air below 10,000 feet. Coming suddenly to a dip in the ground, we put up a herd of gazelle, which went bounding away till their fluffy sterns were lost in the mirage. We reached at last the reverse slope of the hill on which the rams were lying. The wind was all right, but from the top, owing to the curve in the ground, the *ammon* were not in sight, and we found that an approach from that direction, though it looked feasible enough from our starting-point, would have brought us into full view while still out of shot. So harking back we tried another line.

A shallow depression in the ground, down which water might have trickled on the rare occasions of heavy rain, seemed to trend in the right direction and offer concealment. As we got nearer the herd, the difficulty of keeping covered became greater, and we were soon compelled to progress on all-fours. Our depression served us well, however, and when I got to where I judged was the right point, I slowly raised my head. The herd had gone! Raising myself still farther, I saw them all on their feet a hundred yards away standing looking straight at me. What had they seen? Probably

my back or my hat, for at such times one is, ostrich-like, too often under the delusion that because the herd is invisible to the stalker he must be invisible to the herd. Two courses were open at this critical juncture. I could stand straight up and take a snap, for from where I was kneeling the heads only were visible, or I could try to grovel closer to the curve in the ground and get a kneeling or sitting shot. A standing shot with my heart going like a steam turbine was not to be risked, so I grovelled. Thirty yards on I was flat on the ground and out of sight: and the herd? Well, I hoped it was within twice as many yards of me. Drawing my legs under me with the greatest care, I brought them in front, and slowly sat up, keeping my rifle at the level of my eye. Yes, eight white faces were staring at me within almost shot-gun range, and one looked a grand head. Another three inches higher and I could see their necks and the top of their chests. Now, if they would only wait one half-second more! They did; the bead covered the chest below the big head and the trigger was pressed. Seven rams were galloping over the plain. The eighth was kicking up the sand in a vain effort to rise. It was a glorious moment, and so thought Siring Namgyal, for after begging my rifle, from which I took the precaution of extracting the remaining

cartridges, that very ugly man proceeded to dance. One hand brandished the rifle above his head, the other was placed gracefully on his hip, and he hopped slowly round the dead ram. He tried to sing, but words would not come, and he could only give vent to hoarse shouts: "Abdus amarn, Abdus amarn."

The *ammon* was a magnificent specimen, and I felt like joining in the dance. The hour, however, was late, so I set the shikari to work on the obsequies.

We started for camp about four in the afternoon. The way was interminably long, but I had only to look at the ram's head, bobbing along in the dark on the guide's saddle, for such feelings to vanish. The latter's sense of direction was unerring, as is usual among children of the desert, and he took us a bee-line to camp, but it was not till the moon was high in the sky that we saw welcome twinkling lights at the bottom of the long, straight valley we had ascended that morning. And in another hour we had forgotten the silence and solitude of the desert in the light and warmth of camp. By that time there were cravings of the inner man that had to be satisfied without delay.

It is an unfortunate fact that in Ladak, in spite of the game laws passed by the Kashmir "darbar,"

ammon are very scarce, owing chiefly to winter shooting by *changpas;* for, however excellent regulations may be, it is difficult to ensure their being observed in that remote country. Unfortunately for the sportsman, recent events have resulted in Tibet being, perhaps, more closed than ever. Even if it were not so, it would be a mistake to suppose that when once the border of that enchanted country is crossed *ammon* become plentiful. Chumurti and Randur are the two districts in Tibet where, according to report, *ammon* abound; but I found out by bitter experience that, at any rate as regards the latter country, report lied, for during a tour in this district with my wife, we only came on *ammon* rams twice, and I failed to secure a single one. The first of these failures was due to a stupid mistake for which I had no one to thank but myself.

We had heard from some *changpas* that there was a herd of *ammon* in a valley a few miles to the east of our camp, near Keltse Tso (lake), and a start was made early next morning to look for them. Going up a long valley soon after leaving camp my wife spotted a buck gazelle. But he had seen us too, and bolted up a side ravine. I attempted a stalk, but the gazelle kept moving from one ravine to the next, and then stopping

long enough to raise false hopes, in a most tantalising manner. When my patience had become thin, I screwed up the Lyman sight of my rifle to 300 yards and took a shot, and luckily knocked him over, with a bullet through the base of the neck. We went on a long way over sterile, sandy valleys, till, after gradually climbing to a considerable height, we saw the dark-blue lake lying far below us, in a shallow basin of rocks and sand. Beyond, ridge after ridge of ochre-coloured hills stretched away to an immense distance.

We spotted the *ammon* soon after, and, leaving the ponies, went on by ourselves. After half an hour's walking we got to the end of a long promontory of sand and stones, from which we looked down into a valley 1000 feet below us, where the *ammon* were feeding. After we had waited some time, they moved to the other side of the valley, where they would be in a stalkable position; so taking my rifle I essayed an approach, while my wife, perched up aloft with her glasses, as in a box in a theatre, viewed the whole scene laid out before her. With this critical spectator I was more than usually careful, tested the shifting zephyrs at frequent intervals, sometimes crawled, sometimes walked, till a restless ram had moved out of sight, and finally had the satisfaction of surveying the herd not eighty yards

away, from behind a sheltering ridge of rock. I examined them carefully with my glasses to pick out the biggest head, and then, as steady as one elbow on the ground and the other jammed into a corner of rock could make me, took my shot—and missed! I could scarcely believe my eyes. The whole herd galloped straight away. I expected every moment to see one of them fall, or pull up, wounded, but they got farther and farther away and I could not deceive myself with that belief. Following them with my glasses I watched them get smaller in the distance, and after the manner of their kind again and again pirouette round, fore-feet stuck out, to take a look back before dashing on again. And so they disappeared, and I had missed the easiest shot at *ammon* it is possible to imagine.

A thought struck me, and I looked at the back sight of my rifle. It was up to 300 yards, as I had left it after shooting that wretched gazelle!

I have never forgotten the lesson, but have often thought that fate was unkind to choose such a momentous occasion as a shot at an *ammon* to impress it on me.



An ammon head.

AFTER ANTELOPE IN TIBET.

A WIDE sandy plain forms a trough among rolling mountains. The strip of green winding about somewhere near the centre indicates the presence of a little stream which trickles and stagnates, and at night freezes, among boggy tussocks. If you were to look for the stream's source it would be hard to locate, and if you were to trace its downward course you would find somewhere or other it had disappeared, swallowed up in the sands that gave it birth. Eventually, if you were to follow the trend of the valley, you would come on a lake of deepest sapphire blue, its margin marked by dazzling incrustations of salt, into which great evaporating-pan our streamlet would have found its way by subterranean channels, thence to be drawn up into the rare Tibetan air.

The foreground of the scene, unrelieved by trees or shrubs of any kind, is of a light sandy colour, except where a short, coarse species of grass gives it a greenish tint. On either hand

the mountains display every shade of bizarre colouring, not inappropriate to their fantastic outlines. They nowhere ascend to any great height above the valley; but here, far more than on the Pamirs, picturesquely called "the Roof of the World," one can imagine oneself on the leads, among the gables and chimney-stacks of the old earth. The nearer slopes exhibit startling hues in ochres and saffrons, browns and reds; but as they recede in the distance the magic of the air tones them imperceptibly into the most tender shades of blue and purple. Yet far away, where the glitter of the stream is lost among a strange knot of hills, two scarlet cones rise on the horizon, looking like red halves of a monster pomegranate set on end. Such are the "aromatic plains of Tibet."

My wife and I had crossed the Pass forming the boundary between Ladak and Tibet the previous day, though we had been travelling for some weeks in the strange country that forms the western end of the great Tibetan plateau. So far we had seen no antelope, the acquisition of a few heads of which was among the objects of our wanderings, though we had come upon their tracks and knew we were at last in antelope land.

Not many years ago this particularly graceful beast could be seen in large herds in the Chang Chenmo and adjacent valleys of Ladak on the northern Kashmir frontier; but of late they have been driven eastward, till now they are scarcely found to the west of the Tibetan border; while to see them roaming the plain in any considerable numbers one has to travel far into the forbidden country, and reach a land inaccessible to mere globe-trotters and such-like unleisured persons.

Every one has heard how the Tibetan antelope scrapes for himself a hole in the ground, in which he lies so still that his long slender horns look like dry willow shoots sticking out of the ground; and it was only this morning that my wife had pointed out with delight three little beds in the sand, side by side—a big one, a smaller one, and a very diminutive one, evidently the resting-place during the night of some "*papa, maman, et bébé*" of the timid wilderness folk.

As our long line of laden ponies toiled along in the rear, we began that morning to ascend knolls and elevated spots, from which we could look out and examine the plain with our glasses. Though the upper air was clear, with that wonderful dry clearness only found in the high

altitudes of Ladak and Tibet, and which makes a hill two days' journey distant seem within an hour's ride, yet a mirage hung like a veil over the ground and distorted or concealed anything there was moving on it. Once we saw some misty dots appear and then vanish, and on going to the spot found tracks of antelope, but the animals that made them had gone. Tall columns, like shadows thrown by men on smoke, would come near us, which we would discover to be wild asses (or *kyang*)—graceful animals without which no landscape in Chang Thang would be complete, but none the less meddlesome beasts, that spoilt many a good stalk. It was not till we were nearing our camping-ground by the light of the yellow evening sun that on surmounting a little saddle-back we came on a buck antelope standing at gaze by the stream and not three hundred yards from us. No doubt he had seen the tops of our hats come bobbing over the horizon long before we had spotted him. He only waited to see me slip off my pony, with the idea of stalking him black-buck fashion, to lay back his horns and scour away over the plain like an arrow from the bow. From the pace he went one could almost believe there was something in the native story that antelope inflate

themselves with air to "fly before the wind." He did not stop till he reached the slopes on the opposite side of the valley, where he became a distant speck. But we saw with our glasses that, antelope-like, his alarm was but short-lived, and he had begun to graze.

Taking my rifle and a mounted man with me, I made a detour, and soon reached the undulating ground at the bottom of the slopes. Here I dismounted, and leaving the ponies, began what seemed an easy stalk. After crossing some dry ravines I ascended the ridge I had made for, the last few yards on all-fours, but found I was still a good three hundred yards or more from the buck, and no means of getting any closer. It was too far, but after waiting some time I sighted to three hundred yards and took a steady shot lying down. Off went the antelope, but dotty and evidently hit; and luckily for me he took a line down the valley more or less in the direction of camp. Shouting for my pony, I ran back and met my Ladaki dragging the animals towards me and very excited. Then began a long chase. My wife had watched the stalk with her glasses from a rise in the ground near where we had seen the buck first, and grasping the state of affairs, mounted her steed

and, I should like to say, dashed in to turn the buck towards me—

> A sylvan huntress by my side
> To chase the flying deer.

But, alas! our shaggy Ladaki ponies, though certainly of desert descent, did not match the wind for swiftness. She, in short, disappeared into the bottom, where the stream ran, and did not reappear. My pony, too, had no idea of moving out of a trot. Whip and objurgations had no effect, and I could not decrease the buck's lead. I just managed, however, to keep him in sight, and after a couple of miles of the hardest "finishing" I have ever done, saw him dip down into a ravine and not come out again. "Now you're mine," I thought, and leaving my pony approached the edge, rifle in hand. But no buck was to be seen. A blood spoor was there, though, leading out of the ravine, and on surmounting the far slope I saw the buck a long way off now, going steadily away as hard as ever. *Vires acquirit eundo* is too true of many a badly wounded beast. I had been deceived by the ground. My henchman was at hand, so taking his pony, on I went. After more desperate "finishing" with heels and whip, I got within two hundred yards of the buck, when my pony

put his foot into a rat hole and rolled me gently on to the ground. I fired some shots in desperation, the foresight of my rifle wobbling about the brute's bobbing stern, but failed to stop him, and thus had the mortification of seeing my first Tibetan antelope go away. When he was almost out of sight even with the glasses, he made for the slopes and became hidden behind a small spur. One is loath to leave a wounded beast; and though it was getting dusk, I went after him on the chance of his having lain down. Very cautiously I ascended the slope. Suddenly a clatter of stones from below me, and out rushed the buck, going at a great pace. A shot at ten yards, however—even a snap—is not to be missed, and to the crack of the rifle he rolled over. He carried a fine head, the horns measuring over twenty-four inches. Through one of them a small splintered hole showed where one of my wild shots had gone. I was never more delighted at getting a beast.

There is something very charming, at any rate to the official person, in being out of reach of post and telegraph; and here we enjoyed a sense of freedom engendered by the many miles of mountainous desert land that lay between us and the nearest railway. But an altitude of 16,000 feet above sea-level is a wonderful

antidote to excessive animal spirits, and makes the avoidance of physical effort a thing to be studied. So we never walked where we could ride, and even got into the way of doing our stalks in the saddle, at any rate the greater part of them.

The programme of a marching day was somewhat like this. In the early morning dusk a voice outside our tent would be heard: "It's time"; and day by day repeated, the simple words in the cold and dark of a Tibetan morning came like a knell, for if the early morning sleep is dear at sea-level, believe me it becomes much more so when you get up to a great height.

In half an hour, *more or less*, muffled in furs, we would be sitting in the other tent, and old Abdulla, ex-trader and ex-caravan-bashi, who had travelled over half Asia with the explorer Ney Elias and was now our trusted factotum, would be bringing in the samovar and smoking antelope chops. Breakfast would be eaten in the bustle and apparent discomfort of breaking up camp, striking tents, rolling bedding, and loading up animals. Without dallying over this duty meal, we would start on ahead of the caravan, about the time the sun began to touch the tops of the mountains. And how slowly

the line of light used to creep down the mountain-sides, the sun seeming to grudge us cold mortals his feeble warmth! However, all that was soon forgotten in the look-out for antelope and gazelle; for once fairly on the antelope plains, we rarely reached the luncheon place without having a shot. Our cook with the lunch things would have started early, and about noon, rounding a corner, we would see the *shamiana* or awning pitched, a white dot visible miles away on the bare plain. For in this country one experiences great extremes of heat and cold. The sun at midday is a very different individual to what he is at seven o'clock; the heat of the barren ground beats up with tremendous force, and the country being destitute of trees, our little *shamiana* used to be as welcome to us as the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land to Arab or Ishmaelite. About two o'clock on we would go again, tea-things and water slung about our retainers' ponies to use when we felt inclined, and the camping-ground would be reached about four or five. A camping place in this country, by the way, means any spot where there is grass for the ponies, water to drink, and *argols* or *burtza* for fuel.

The baggage coming a direct road, and without halts, would arrive shortly afterwards, or at any

rate we felt annoyed if it did not, and tents would spring up like magic; but that delightful adjunct of Himalayan camps, a roaring fire, was conspicuous by its absence in this woodless country. In this way twenty-five or thirty miles would be covered in a day,—sometimes more, for the distances in Tibet are so vast that marches have to be lengthened in proportion to reach anywhere at all. Fellow-travellers or habitations there were none. The only inhabitants of the country are nomad Tibetans, or *Changpas* as they are called.

As for supplies, we carried these with us, all except the meat which walked—in the shape of sheep,—though this became superfluous when we were amongst the antelope; while for milk we had a little flock of white goats, each of which contributed about a teaspoonful. (What would an English cow say to being marched thirty miles and milked at the end?)

As regards the sport of antelope-shooting in Tibet, my experience of it came after many years' shooting in the Himalaya, where every stalk is a serious undertaking, a climax only attained perhaps after many days' hard work; and I must confess that the pursuit of the nimble *cheru* gave me a lot of pleasure. The fact that with luck one might get two or three shots in a day did not

to my mind at all detract from the pleasure of it. Near the Ladak frontier the antelope are very wild and difficult to approach, but farther east, where they are less shot at, they are less so; though of course everywhere it much depends whether they are found on an open plain or in the neighbourhood of hills which afford cover in stalking.

Antelope are pretty beasts, standing about thirty-two inches high. Their colour varies from brown to fawn, the under part being of a lighter shade, almost white. Under the short stiff hair lies a layer of wonderful soft white wool that is woven into exquisite *pashmina*. This can be plucked out in handfuls, and is valuable. Their slender horns have a graceful curve, and frequently have a high polish in the natural state. In a country like Tibet, where an old provision tin or the lid of a packing-case is a very valuable asset, the horns are put by the natives to all sorts of uses. Perhaps the most appropriate use is as a rifle-rest, when a pair of them are attached to the barrel by a hinge, the points when in use sticking into the ground. The better the rifle, of course the more help such a rest would be; and it has often occurred to me to ask why we should be superior to the idea for our indifferent shots in the Army. The Tibetans also

make an ingenious trap for antelope out of the same material, and this they prefer using to bullets or powder, which are hard to come by. This consists of a ring three or four inches in diameter, made of splinters of horn bound round with goat-hair twine. Sticking out towards the centre are a number of horn spikes, so arranged as to allow an antelope's foot to go through in one direction but not to be withdrawn. The snare is covered with a sprinkling of sand, and set attached to a heavy stone on one of the numerous paths made by antelope.

Though their colour matches their surroundings, antelope, owing to their being so often on the move, are not as a rule difficult to see; but when motionless, like other hill beasts, they "turn into stones." And by the same token stones are frequently mistaken for one's quarry; and, curiously enough, if you start with the idea that a stone on a distant hill is an animal, the more you stare at it the more it appears to be ascending the hill. In illustration of this I must record an anecdote, which by the way is the story of a "record." It occurred a few mornings after the first antelope had been shot. The lady of the party, whose vision, I may remark, was second to no one's, had for a few days previously been particularly successful in

spotting "pale-coloured animals" which appeared to be "climbing up the hill." That too large a proportion of these turned out to be of the "sandstone" or "conglomerate" variety, I would not venture to assert, but somehow the things she pointed out on the hillsides came to be referred to as "pale climbers" (as opposed to antelope), which was no doubt an absolutely unjust reflection on her eyesight.

We were riding as usual some way ahead of the caravan, when my eye caught sight of a light sandy-coloured object on the side of a hill which lay to one side of the track we were following. It seemed too light a colour for an antelope, but then again it did not look like a stone, though it was quite motionless. If I had been by myself I should have used my glasses without a second's thought; but I had been talking about "pale climbers," which made it difficult. The wife had her eye on it I could see, but a similar reticence on the matter seemed to overcome her too, so we proceeded in silence.

After going a little way, when my thoughts had drifted to something else, she suddenly remarked: "Well, I'm not going to blunder on to an antelope and pretend it's a stone, if you are," and dropping the reins on her pony's neck she forthwith took a survey through her glasses. It was,

she declared, a big buck antelope fast asleep! And clearly it was the lady's shot.

We turned our ponies round, and sending a man to stop the caravan, rode quietly round to the opposite side of the hillock to that on which the buck was lying. Tying the ponies' heads together (in other countries this might make ponies kick, in this country it makes them stand), we left them and quietly ascended. Arrived at the top, we found, as is frequently the case with the round hills of Tibet, that the ground curved away in front, and anything a little way down the hill could not be seen at all. So we walked cautiously down. Farther and farther we went. Nothing in view. "Now, was it a stone after all?" I asked myself. Suddenly up sprang an antelope from under our feet, like a hare out of her form, and was gone a hundred yards before my wife could sit down or I could whistle. Then I whistled for all I was worth. Curiosity, thy name surely is antelope! He stopped and turned round broadside. Crack went the rifle, and the buck died in a heap. It was 165 measured yards, and I believe the first Tibetan antelope shot by a lady. I let some time elapse before I said anything more about "pale climbers."

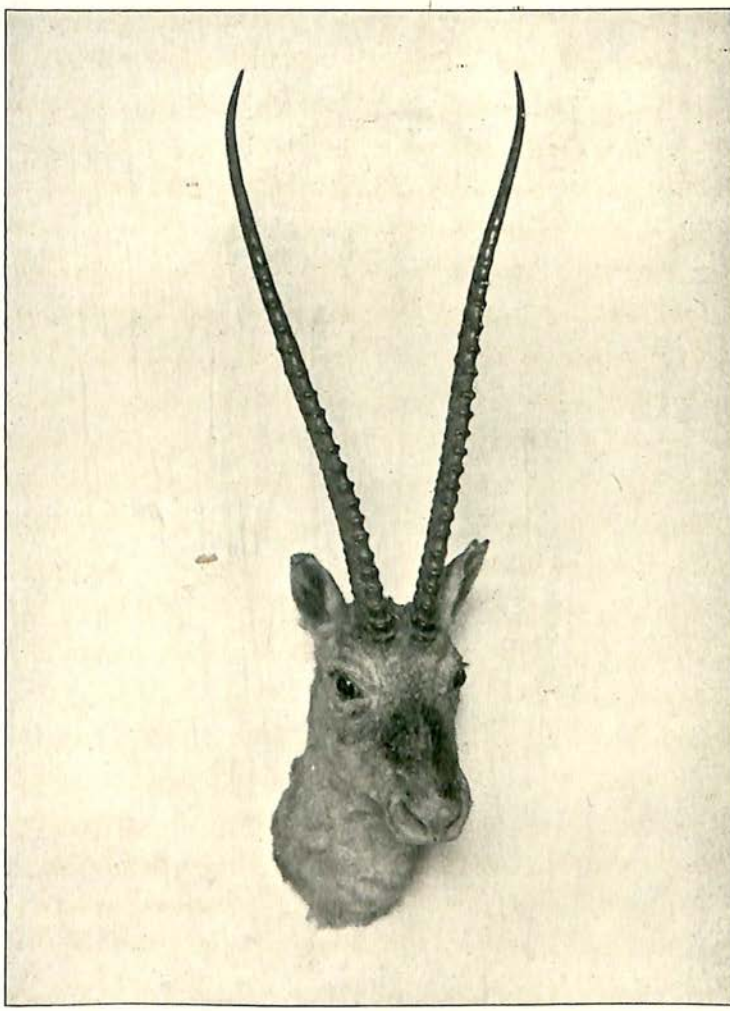
While on the subject of illusions I may mention another to which the stalker of Tibetan antelope

may, like the writer, fall a prey. I had had a shot at a buck, and to all appearance missed him clean. I had watched him gallop away till he had put a respectable distance between us, and was debating in my mind whether he was worth following, or whether it would not save time and temper to look for a fresh beast. Suddenly I saw him start madly galloping straight towards me. On he came at full split, when all of a sudden his legs seemed to crumple up beneath him, and he came crash down on the ground as if he had had a bullet through the brain. I had seen nothing like it before, and the analogy of a "towered bird" at once occurred to me. I thought I must have hit him with the small Mannlicher bullet in some vital spot, but that the wound had taken a little time to prove fatal, or the exertion of galloping away might have caused some further injury. Anyhow he was dead, I thought, and the reason of his queer behaviour could now be ascertained. I hastened up towards him, when what was my surprise to see him on his legs again lolloping gaily away! The explanation seems to be in a small stinging grub found underneath Tibetan antelopes' skins. What I had taken to be the buck's death-run was no more than the result of the sting of one of the larvæ; but why the collapse at the end? I have witnessed the same thing on two occasions, so

suppose it is not uncommon, though I have nowhere seen it mentioned by sportsmen.

There is naturally not *very* much variety to be found in antelope stalking: but in their country you have in addition the gigantic yak; the burhel, half goat half sheep; the *Ovis ammon*, "father of all the flocks on earth"; and the Tibetan gazelle.

The rifle you require is one whose bullet will go "a very long way in a very little time," naturally one of the modern small-bores with split soft-nose bullets, with the flattest trajectory possible. The drawback, though at the same time the charm, of the country, is its remoteness. But at the same time no one who has once penetrated into the "mist of that dim land" has ever regretted it or failed to succumb to its fascination.



Head of Tibetan antelope.

THE LAPCHAK.

LET the reader imagine himself transported far away to the Tibetan borderland beyond Kashmir. Here India has imperceptibly merged into Chinese Tartary. The white-crested billow-like sierras of the Hindu Kush have subsided into the heaving swell of the great Chang, and the most elevated region in the world is reached, where the lowest valleys are lifted higher above the earth's mean surface than the summits of the loftiest mountains in Europe.

In a wide sandy plain, forming a trough amid these mountains, lies a lake of deep blue water. The margin of the lake glistens white with incrustations of the salts with which the water is impregnated; and far away in the distance, where the blue can no longer be seen, a white line wavering in the mirage, and seemingly lifted up in the dry quivering air, marks its extent. The echoless silence of very high regions hangs over all, only broken at intervals by the melancholy

call of the Brahminy duck or the distant note of wild geese.

The plain is at this season of a yellowy-green tint, from the coarse scanty grass with which it is covered, gradually fading into a lighter shade where the plain becomes mountain. White patches here and there mark borax and soda efflorescence. The sun beats down with the intensity only felt in thin air. The scene is not without animal life, for a herd of *kyang*, or wild asses, can be seen on the yellow shale slopes, distant it may be half a mile, it may be treble as far, manœuvring in sections and half sections like a troop of cavalry. Distances cannot be judged in the clear air of Tibet. Nearer still, where the grass is thickest, little spots of white, appearing and disappearing, show, to the keen-eyed only, the presence of a herd of *goa*, or Tibetan gazelle.

The human element is present in a few black tents pitched near an arm of the lake. Their *changpa* owners can be seen sitting at their tent-doors spinning wool, or else moving about among the hundreds of yaks and goats scattered round the encampment.

It is nothing short of marvellous how these shepherds of Rupshu support an existence, the conditions of which are so inimical to life. They



Changpa (nomad) encampment.



Ladaki dance.

live at a height where breathing is itself a burden to the normally constituted, in a country where cereals and timber are not, and the only vegetation is the coarse grass and *burtsa*, which grows sparingly on the hillsides and valleys. Even this latter is not always obtainable, and then they have to depend for fuel, in a climate where the thermometer frequently falls many degrees below zero, on dry droppings of yak and sheep. The cold of these regions is intensified by bitter winds, but their tents are of the poorest description, made of black blanketing suspended from sticks from the outside — the rude origin of the beautiful pagoda architecture. Very different are they from the roomy, warm, and comfortable *yorts* of the nomads of the Pamirs. Flocks and herds are their sole means of livelihood; their only food besides milk and "dairy produce" being the barley-meal and tea they get in exchange for wool.

A track running east and west passes close by the tents, and is lost to view in the distance, where the mountains gradually merge into plain. Towards evening, a cloud of dust, looking golden under the setting sun, appears hanging in the west, and attracts the attention of the tent dwellers. It betokens the approach of a caravan, and as it comes nearer, a black mass consisting of moving yaks and men can be seen below it. The yaks are

some eighty in number, and laden with bales. Moving on a broad front, they progress at a fairly rapid rate, driven by bare-shouldered Ladakis to an accompaniment of shouts and whistles which can be heard from far.

Of the yaks and their drivers it would be hard to say which would appear the stranger of the two to one who had seen neither before. The latter plainly belong to the yellow races, and have the prominent cheek-bones, almost hairless faces characteristic of this branch of the human race. Their black hair is drawn into a pigtail at the back, their heads being covered by a flapped cap of lambskin, the flaps of which are turned up during the heat of the day. Their clothing consists of little more than a voluminous sheepskin cloak confined round their waist by a girdle; but these are now slipped off their shoulders, leaving them bare. On their feet are high boots of felt and soft leather. They walk with a peculiar roll, but can cover great distances. The Ladaki physiognomy is distinctly homely, but honest-looking and not unpleasing, offering in this respect a marked contrast to their nomad brethren, the tent-dwelling *changpas*, whose double-facedness is proverbial in these parts.

The bovines they are driving belong to the variety known as the "grunting-ox," uncouth

shaggy monsters that look as if they had walked out of a "prehistoric peep." They are useful animals in these high regions, from their ability to carry loads at elevations where other animals are useless, and in spite of their apparent clumsiness are wonderfully sure-footed on bad ground. Their value in these parts is enhanced by the fact that grain is not a necessity for them. They refuse in fact to eat it, a peculiarity which probably points to comparatively recent domestication.

The caravan has now arrived at the encampment. Loads are taken off and stacked, and the yaks turned loose to graze are quickly scattered over the plain. The new arrivals and the shepherds foregather round the fire, and as the sun sets and the bitter night wind springs up, their barley-meal and tea is eaten. The twilight is soon gone, and by the time the last flicker of colour dies out in the west and the night is unfolded in its cloudless brilliancy, the camp sinks into silence and sleep.

The rime is still sparkling in the light of the morning moon when the camp awakes. The strayed animals are collected and loaded up, and before the beams of the rising sun strike the distant snow-peaks the caravan is lost to view and hearing.

A few days later, it is again evening, when

the cloud of dust appears once more, heralding the approach of another caravan. Again the black mass of yaks draws near and the same scene is enacted, and so on for a fortnight, with a few days' interval between each caravan. A few days behind the rearmost caravan comes a party of a different kind, whose arrival is announced by a confused jangle of bells. At the head rides an advanced party of two men, one of whom bears a red standard. They are clad in red velvet frocks shaped after the Tibetan manner, confined round their waists by *kammarbands,* in which are stuck crossways long swords with silver scabbards, incrusted with turquoises and corals. Their hair is smoothed down in a straight fringe over their eyes, making their already low Mongolian foreheads appear still lower. Felt Tibetan caps with turned-up brims surmount their heads, and the costume is completed by long riding-boots of red and white *numdah.* A little distance behind there comes a caravan consisting of a hundred or more mules of good size and quality, laden with bales and chests, with a driver to every ten or so; and behind these again ride a company of apparently some rank and title. It is time, however, before describing these, that the reader should be afforded some enlightenment as to the meaning of

the procession of caravans he has encountered in these elevated wilds.

In the days of Llachen dé legs Namgyal, King of Ladak, who was then lord also of the province known as Ngareskoorsum in Western Tibet, these territories were invaded by a Tibetan army under the "ex-lama" Tsang. With the help of the Nawab of Kashmir the invaders were driven back, and were invested in the fort of Tashisgang, on the Indus. The sequel may be given in the words of the Ladaki historian, as translated by the late Dr Karl Marks of the Moravian Mission at Leh:—

> "The Depazhung (or Lhassa Government) desired the Dugpa Omniscient one (Mi-pam-wang-po) to go and negotiate for peace. The result of their deliberations was as follows: 'The Bodpa have come to consider that whereas Tibet is a Buddhistic and Kashmir a non-Buddhistic country, and whereas Buddhistic and non-Buddhistic religions have nothing in common, it follows that if at the frontier the King of Ladak does not prosper, Bod also cannot enjoy prosperity. The occurrences of the recent war should be considered things of the past.'
>
> "The King, on the other hand, undertook

in future to keep watch at the frontier of Buddhistic and non-Buddhistic faiths, and out of regard for the doctrine of Sangsgyas would not allow the army from India to proceed to an attack upon Bod. As to merchandise in demand in Kashmir, the following agreement was come to: The fine wool of Ngareskoorsum shall not be sold to any other country; that the price of fine and coarse wool mixed shall be fixed at eighty *nyag* or two rupees, to be paid both in money and kind; that the Chang-thang people shall not be allowed to use the *nyag* of the people of the Indus gorge; that it shall not be said of the wool of the Chang that it contains soil, stones, or moisture; and that to Rudok itself none but the Court merchant shall be admitted. Regarding the fine wool trade, four Kashmiri merchants shall reside at Spectub and do the trading with the Kashmiris of Kashmir; this shall be the only way by which it shall go to Kashmir. No Kashmiri of Kashmir shall be allowed to go to Chang-thang. Those Ladak Kashmiris who go to Chang-thang shall not be allowed themselves to go down to Kashmir with loads of fine wool. Regarding Ngareskoorsum,

Mi-pam-wang-po's stipulations were to this effect: It shall be set apart to meet the expenses of sacred lamps and prayers at Lhassa, but at Minsar the King shall be his own master, so that the Kings of Ladak may have wherewithal to pay for lamps and other sacrifices at Kailas; and the lake, it shall be his private domain. With this exception the boundary shall be fixed at the Lhari stream at Demjok. From Tibet the Government trader shall come with two hundred loads of tea, and nowhere but by Ladak shall rectangular tea-bricks be sent across the frontier. The King of Ladak, on the other hand, shall send once in three years a mission conveying presents to the clergy of Bod. As regards presents to ordinary lamas, the quantity and quality is not fixed; but to the Labrang steward shall be given ten *zho* of gold, ten *shang* of scent, six pieces of calico, and one piece of cotton cloth. Throughout their sojourn, the mission shall receive daily rations; for the road, beasts of burden shall be supplied to carry two hundred loads, fifteen baggage, and ten riding, ponies; private ponies shall have as much fodder as they like for the steppe districts."

This, then, is the explanation of the succession of caravans we have seen toiling eastward. It is the embassy sent by the King of Ladak to pay the triennial tribute to the Grand Lama[1] of Tibet and the "Clergy of Bod." The fact that there is now no King of Ladak, this country having many years ago been absorbed into the State of Kashmir, the result of King Llachen de legs Namgyal's ill-advised request for assistance, has fortunately not led to the abandonment of the reciprocal missions between Ladak and Lhassa. They still continue—that from Lhassa coming to Ladak every year, and that starting from Ladak going to Lhassa every third year. The Lapchak, as it is called (properly Lochak), returns from Lhassa the year following, carrying return presents to the Maharajah of Kashmir, the representative of the old Ladak kings. There are, indeed, pecuniary interests at stake which, apart from other considerations, prevent the old practice falling into desuetude. The privilege allowed to the Lapchak of free carriage from Ladak to Lhassa and back, nominally to the extent of two hundred and sixty loads, but really very much more, together with other perquisites sanctioned by long custom,

[1] This article was written before the flight of the Dalai Lama. The Lapchak mission, however, still continues.

make it an undertaking rewarded by no small profits.

So the party forming the last of the detachments consists of the chief of the mission and his attendants. Sidiq-joo, the bearded man in blue silk robes, white turban, and long Yarkandi boots, is the head of the mission. He is a partner in the well-known trading firm of Nasr Shah of Leh, a family of Mohammedan Arghuns (half-castes of Ladaki and Mohammedan origin) who have long had the *entrée* of Lhassa, and have relations living there—a privilege usually denied to all but Buddhists. The titular head of the mission must, however, necessarily be a Ladaki Buddhist of good family, for to none but one of this faith could audience with the Dalai Lama, or even with the Panchen Rimpoche of Tashi Lunpo, second only in holiness to the Dalai Lama himself, be accorded. The individual selected this year as the head of the mission for ceremonial purposes is one Bongpa, the clean-shaven, austere-looking man in a rich silk cloak with a black velvet mitre on his head. The "Man who has to present the Lochak" is the title by which he is referred to in the letter he carries.

Behind these come a mixed escort of Arghuns and Ladakis, conspicuous among whom is the

treasurer with an enormous bunch of keys, and the tea-maker with his huge teapot of copper and silver on the saddle in front of him.

The mission carry credentials with them in the shape of letters from the Wazir of Ladak to the civil and ecclesiastical dignitaries of Gartok, Tashi Lunpo, and other important places on the road, as well as to those of Lhassa. The style of these is humble, not to say abject. Here is a specimen, addressed to the Panchen Rimpoche of Tashi Lunpo:—

> To the lotus-ornamented golden throne of the most high, all-knowing, all-seeing Panchen, the jewel of the vertex of all gods and living beings, the saviour without equal. The pious beg to submit with reverence. Now as you are like the great lord who has on his head all the different deities, and who reaches unto the periphery of the sea, and as you are the incarnation of the great god to living beings, being firm like a diamond, and having the wisdom of the three secrets. Along with the returning Lochak, as stated in the letter sent by you, arrived the presents—a godly garment, fine cloth, one piece. That was a great, great favour. And have the white mind to help



The "man who has to present the Lochak."

the High Government. Also, this year in the former way we have sent this Man who has to present the Lochak. Please look upon him with grace and mercy, and help him as formerly. Furthermore, may you, who are the incomparable jewel of the vertex of all the gods and men whom you are guiding to heaven, be firm in your health. Send upon the crown of our head your words of different kinds, like the flowing of the cleansing water of the four corners,—please, please.

"The presents which we lift up as a prayer are a pure white scarf, a piece of *kimkhab*, a load of apricots."

The following is a specimen of one of the letters which the Lochak brought back with him from Lhassa, in the "Water-monkey year." It is couched in a somewhat different strain, and is addressed by the Ambans to the ruler of Ladak. The Ambans, it should be mentioned, are the Chinese representatives at the Court of the Grand Lama:—

"Know this, that by the Lochak your supplication has reached, and that which according to the treaty every year has to be presented to both of us great ministers,

has arrived as stated in the letter; but only because the bringer says with an earnest mind that the way is very long, and you presented it with great reverence and a simple heart, we don't like to reproach you. One load of dried apricots you may reckon as accepted by us, but at the same time we send you the one bale of cotton cloth back. In the same way we give you in return a present, and have sent two pieces of cloth, two scarves, flinging them away from our side to you, and you have to take it immediately to your account. Keep it always in your mind that you must govern the people under you as well as you can, and that you must keep peace with the surrounding petty kings, and live on friendly terms. This is most important. Referring to this, you have to take it to heart that you have to write a letter to us."

Whether or no the "Omniscient Ones" at Lhassa are really unaware that Ladak is no longer a State feudatory to them, and that there are remaining no "surrounding petty kings" with whom the Ladak ruler could go to war, who can tell? They have learnt many things of late years,

and perhaps this also. Perhaps the tribute-bearing mission is recognised by them also as a convenient fiction with which to cloak commercial dealings with a non-Buddhistic country. Anyhow, the Lapchak remains one of the few links connecting Lhassa with the outside, and, in Tibetan opinion, the less important part of the world.

The articles of commerce the mission takes to Lhassa are of different kinds, the most important being: dried apricots, corals, velvet, saffron, and English piece goods, also *alwan*, or *pashmina*, from Kashmir; for the Tibetans have not the art of weaving their superb wool into the finest sorts of cloth. In return, the Lapchak brings musk, turquoises, *cherus* (a sort of inferior astrakhan), and Chinese brick-tea. The foundation of the trade is the last commodity, for in spite of the distance of Ladak and Turkestan from the tea-gardens of China, this form of the leaf more than holds its own with the Indian article in these parts. Into Tibet the latter finds no entry at all, as the brick-tea brought from Szechuan is the monopoly of Government officials and State traders, and a most profitable one, for it is thrust on the people whether they want it or no. When they do not want or cannot afford it, the transaction is simplified; for on the payment becoming due the official vendor receives his tea back, plus

his profits on the deal and interest. For Tibet is a dark country, the people suffering the oppression on the one hand of the officials from Lhassa, on the other of the monasteries—the former having complete powers over their bodies, the latter over their souls.

The brick-tea which occupies such an important place in the lives of all Tibetans, fulfilling as it does most of the purposes of a currency, is not really the rubbish it has been described by many Tibetan travellers. The worst qualities of the tea, it is true, are composed of the coarser leaves of the plant intermixed with twigs, but the better qualities are made from high-class pickings. But all sorts have certain special qualities that make the bricks invaluable to nomadic peoples. The peculiar process of manufacture the bricks undergo, which, so far, Indian factories have quite failed to imitate, renders them easy to cut or break without making them friable, so that they stand transport well without crumbling. Connoisseurs of Central Asia affirm that this tea is far more digestible than other teas, green or black, and its final claim to superiority is that three infusions, or I should more properly say decoctions, can be made from it.

A Tibetan tea-maker's recipe might run as follows: Thoroughly boil a handful of tea in



Waves from Lhassa.



Members of the Lapchak.

sufficient water; when the liquor is of the right colour, add an equal measure of butter to the tea used, and salt to taste. Pour the whole into the churn and agitate vigorously for three minutes, or until the ingredients are well amalgamated. Decant into a large teapot, and allow to simmer gently on the fire. Serve hot.

This compound looks like cocoa, but would, I should say, have to be submitted to the European palate—after the plan recommended by Ruskin—a good many times before any pleasing aroma could be detected in it, and I have not so far met any one that has had the courage to continue the trial long enough. For Tibetans, however, it is meat and drink, and they continue sipping and drinking it for hours.

The turquoises brought by the Lapchak come from the mines of Szechuan, and are quite different from the turquoises of commerce which come from Persia. They look like irregularly shaped blue pebbles, varying in size from a pea to a hen's egg. They are full of black veins and flaws, and are almost useless for cutting as jewels. In Ladak and Tibet they are chiefly used in the ornamentation of monastery utensils and musical instruments, and are also worn by the Ladaki women as jewellery in great quantities. In fact,

the movable wealth of a Ladaki woman is always converted into turquoises.

The musk brought from Lhassa consists, of course, of the pods of the musk-deer which are said to abound in the birch-forests to the south of the chief province of Tibet.

Among the articles brought by the Lapchak, I should not forget to mention the beautiful copper, silver, and brass teapots and other vessels which come from Lhassa and Kham, and form the object of many a curio-hunter's visit to Leh. The shapes of these are particularly quaint and beautiful, albeit the frequent occurrence of the dragon betokens in many of them a Chinese origin of design. The workmanship is also exceedingly good.

The curious custom of trading by means of State embassies is not confined to the Lapchak mission, although this, and the return mission from Lhassa, known as the Chabba, are the most notable instances. Many other missions of a similar kind, sanctioned either by long custom or agreement, pass backwards and forwards over the frontier. Among these may be noticed the mission sent to Tibet by the Stok and Masho Gyalpos, the present-day representatives of the old ruling family of Ladak, and from the Tibet side that despatched to Ladak by the Garpons of



Tibetan curios.

Gartok, the joint-viceroys of Western Tibet. The monastery of the red lamas at Hemis, and a few other of the more important Ladak monasteries, also enjoy similar privileges in conjunction with the affiliated monastic institutions in Tibet.

The Lapchak, which is the Kashmir State mission, is financed to some extent from the State coffers. The rupees advanced used formerly to be repaid to the State, after the return of the mission, in Chinese tea-bricks; but the auction of this quantity of tea gave rise to so many abuses that the present custom of repaying both principal and interest in cash was substituted.

But to return to the caravans, which we left moving slowly eastward. In a few days they will have crossed the frontier of Ladak, the "Lhari stream at Demjok," and entered the forbidden land. Their road lies along the banks of the Indus, but lately sprung from his cradle among the peaks of Kailas. The famous river is here but a child in the Buddhist land of its birth—a small and shallow stream, sometimes rippling along between grassy banks, sometimes meandering sluggishly among boggy flats, fordable nearly everywhere. Who would recognise the same river in his tempestuous youth, when, with leaping waves, he thunders and surges down the gorges of Haramosh and Chilas? Or who, again, in his

middle age, where he emerges from the Himalayas, having triumphantly burst through these stupendous barriers, a broad and deep but silently rolling flood? Still more unlike his trans-Himalayan childhood is the old age of this mighty river, for this is passed among the deserts of Sind, where, bearer of ships and commerce, he blesses his banks with fields of verdure, and turns a wilderness into a garden; till, gliding peacefully onward, the end of his long journey is attained —the ocean and Nirvana.

A week's marching along the banks of the river, after leaving the Ladak frontier, will bring our caravan to Gar Gunsa, or Gartok, the summer headquarters of the Garpons, a town composed, with the exception of the Garpons' residences, entirely of tents. The yaks will here be dismissed, and their loads will henceforth be carried by Tibetan-owned animals. The mules, however, which are the traders' own property, and carry the more precious loads of coral, saffron, &c., will go the whole way to Lhassa.

At every place of importance on the route the Lapchak will be received with almost royal honours, their approach being heralded by the hoarse boom of great trumpets from the monasteries perched up on high places. At Gartok the mission will find the annual fair in progress, and

will meet traders from Kulu, Lahoul, Nepal, and all the surrounding parts—a strange medley, knit together by a strange creed.

Passing on from here, they will continue their journey towards the rising sun, through the land "where there is gold," leaving the sacred mountains of Kailas, the mystic sources of Indus and Brahmaputra, and the famous lakes of Mansarowar, on their right hand, and so on to the great monastery of the yellow lamas at Tashi Lunpo. Here they will rest for a while and present their offerings to the Panchen Rimpoche, the head of the Gelugpa sect. They will then enter on the final stage of their journey, and three months after passing through the gates of Leh, will enter the holy city of Lhassa.

ABOUT YAK.

MEDIEVAL beasts and birds may be divided into two categories. Those whose image became, as years rolled on, less and less defined, till they merged into the purely legendary; and those, like the *dong*, as the wild yak is called, whose existence has been confirmed by modern travel. Let me first present a picture of the yak as he lived in the imagination of old Eastern writers. "This is a very wild and ferocious beast," says the Tarikhi Rashidi, "in whatever manner it attacks it proves fatal. Whether it strikes with its horns or kicks or overthrows its victim. If it has no opportunity of doing any of these things, it tosses its victim twenty yards into the air with its tongue, and he is dead before reaching the ground."

According to the Haft Iklim, the yak kills "with its horns, by its kicks, by treading under foot, and by tearing with its teeth;"[1] while the Emperor Humayun is reported to have made the remarkable

[1] Yule's Marco Polo.

statement, that after it had knocked a man down it skinned him from head to heels by licking him with its tongue!

The real wild yak, while not possessing quite the fearsome attributes these writers invested him with, looses little in interest by the light of publicity that in these days beats on the most retiring of animals. What if his combatant instinct is (*pace* Sven Hedin) small? Till human hunters came on the scene, he was sole monarch over his wind-swept plains and valleys, and had no struggle for existence of the kind that develops truculency. What if his terrible hoofs are used for no more aggressive purpose than to carry his huge bulk over high mountains, his horny tongue for nothing more sinister than to scrape up the mosses and vegetation that afford no tooth-hold? His home is the uninhabited regions of Tibet, midway between heaven and earth, and his vast frame is nourished by the sparse verdure that fringes the region where no green thing can grow. It is hardly strange that an animal of his size, that can find sustenance and congenial surroundings where the normally made perish for want of oxygen, should have been given a supernatural halo of ferocity.

From a sporting point of view, the yak has his failings. He has not the eyesight of other moun-

tain game,—in fact, he might almost be called myopic: he is not the fighter that his kinsmen of the Indian jungles are. But do not let any big-game hunter imagine that when he goes out to slay a yak he will have a mere butcher's job in front of him. He may start from home with this idea. But after reaching the country, where a small incline sets the heart thumping in a most disquieting manner, and the mere thought of a long climb provokes a feeling of "is any animal worth it?"; when the quarry is spied at the head of a long valley that seems to slope endlessly up to the sky; when the wind is patchy, and it will take half a long day's toil to encompass a doubtful stalk,—then he will lose the farm-yard idea, if indeed he ever retained it after reaching their wild bleak country.

Fortunately, it is possible to ride over much of the ground, and even to do parts of the stalks on pony-back. The stress of living in high altitudes is great, and the man that wants to be fit to climb when necessity arises, not to speak of having his nerves in fit condition to shoot, should ride as much as he can and undertake no unnecessary work.

On the "Chang" there are two kinds of grass—the coarse scanty kind that grows on the hillsides, and the short succulent *spang* that is found at the

bottom of the valleys and near water. Yak prefer the latter, and are rarely found far away from it except when on the move. These bovines are of course ridiculously easy to see and quite unmistakable when seen. Bulls and cows are not readily distinguishable at a distance. The males stand higher and are bigger all round, having especially much bigger necks than the cows. They have also bushier tails, and their horns are thicker, and do not, like the cows' horns, have a marked terminal upward curve. Careful as he may be, the inexperienced may fail to distinguish the sexes, but a man of the country should never make a mistake. I would not, of course, guarantee their judgment in the matter if the camp happened to be short of meat!

The biggest bulls are usually found alone or with one or two companions of their own sex, except in the late autumn, when they join the herd. It must be admitted that the yak, uncouth, hirsute, and monstrous as he is, fails somewhat in dignity of appearance. His head is set on too low, while the matted fringe of hair falling down from his flanks and quarters like petticoats, and the great bush of hair at the end of his tail, give him an aspect more "prehistoric" than majestic.

In that interesting book of travel 'The Memoirs of Colonel Gardner,' an account is given of the

way these animals are hunted: "When pursued by horsemen and dogs and on the point of being taken, it hides its hindquarters in some bush and there waits for its enemies, imagining perhaps that if it could conceal its tail, which it considers perhaps as the object they are in search of it for, it will escape unhurt."

Would I were able to describe the manner in which I participated in so picturesque a scene, but this I fear is impossible, for several reasons. Since, however, I have essayed to write about yak, I will attempt to describe a day in pursuit of this quadruped as it actually happened, and since there can be few ladies who have been at the death of a Tibetan *dong*, it shall be a day on which I was accompanied by my wife.

Scene, a camp amid rolling mountains, 15,000 feet above sea-level. By the light of the morning star a man and a woman emerge from their tent with the absence of conversation that characterises very early rising, scramble on ponies, and with two pig-tailed men similarly mounted put their steeds at a mountain-side whose crest-line is dimly outlined against the stars. Day breaks, and they are still climbing upwards. The scree is steep and rough going; the air is cold—though little enough of it—and they try walking. By the time the crest-line is reached the country

is bathed in sunlight, and on every side an ocean of rounded hills and valleys can be seen stretching away in the distance. Glasses out, an examination reveals—nothing. So on to the next ridge, and the next, and the next.

. . . . . .

The sun was high when we arrived at the top of a crest-line similar to many we had crossed that morning, but when we looked down, lo! the valley beneath us was full of yak. There must have been a hundred of them scattered about in groups, some lying down, some grazing, big and little,—a regular bazaar of yak. It was a sight, the greatness of which was not lessened by the fact at once apparent, that by walking down behind the ridge we were on we could get within a hundred yards of the concourse, unseen. But no such easy triumph was to be ours, for a prolonged and careful examination of each beast showed that there was no bull among them.

Perhaps it was as well. Whilst we were watching them, some mysterious animal telepathy seemed to arouse in them a sense of danger, for they drew together in a solid phalanx and in this formation walked unhurriedly away. One was soon unable to distinguish individual beasts, and then I think was the time we were most struck by the strangeness of the sight. What were

they like? A patch of velvet mysteriously sliding over the mountain-slopes of its own accord, or a gigantic swarm of black insects?

An hour later we were looking with the telescope up a wide valley that debouched at our feet and sloped gradually upwards to a high pass some six miles away. Below the pass, where the green grass ended, three black dots were faintly discernible through the thin clouds that hung about the upper end of the valley. Since these dots shifted their position they were declared by our men to be yak, and since there were three only they were declared to be bulls. It was some way past noon, and the stalk would be a long one; owing, moreover, to the shape of the ground and the unsteady wind—for the yak's chief protection is his extraordinary sense of smell—it was evident that the stalk would be full of hazard. The only certainty, if we tried it, was that of being benighted. My wife, however, indignantly rejected the proposal that she should take one man back to camp, so we started.

By making use of the lateral ravines we got over some four miles of the ground on our ponies, but were then brought to a standstill by finding that the line we had selected to guard our wind was the wrong one for the shot. The valley had

to be crossed in the open, so we left our ponies and proceeded. What need to describe the anxieties of that flank movement? The three of us made a line to present but one profile. Then running, walking, stooping, crawling, as the ground exacted, we crossed. Every hunter of big game knows the mingled feelings of hope and fear with which this crisis in the stalk was accomplished. Breathless, but extraordinary to relate undetected, we found ourselves behind the corner of a ridge of rock which ran close by the place where the yak were grazing. A minute's pause, to let the heart-thumps caused by a rapid scramble at somewhere about 18,000 feet quiet down, and the final stage of the stalk began. In twenty more minutes I was sitting, elbows on knees, with the ·450 cordite rifle held with hands none too steady on one of the three beasts eighty yards below me. All were big bulls. At the shot, one of them furiously whirled his tail, and all began to trot uphill; but before they turned the corner and were hidden I had had a shot at each of the three of them. When we had got down to the bottom they were in view again. The one I had shot at first had collapsed; another was walking away evidently sore stricken; the third doubtful. We followed hard. Legs soon turned to lead, and

my breath came in gasps. It was evident that going uphill the wounded beasts had the legs of us. As I got to the bottom of the steep ascent leading to the pass, one of the yak was half-way up, some three or four hundred yards away; the other had separated and made for going up a big mountain to the right, and was now a long way off. I determined to try and cripple the wounded beast still more before he topped the pass, so took the ·256 and lay down. Two shots went low; the third, as he stood for a second at the top, seemed like a hit, for he gave a whisk with his tail—then he was gone.

It was too late to go farther, so back to where my wife had remained an excited spectator, taking with me the dead yak's tail. The others would have to be seen to-morrow. A hasty cup of tea and we started on the long ride to camp, made longer because we had to take a circuitous road by the plains instead of the morning's route, which would have been impossible in the dark. The sun sank, and we were soon riding by starlight. There is something in the effect of a long ride by night which is almost hypnotic. The eye, it may be, fixes itself on a single star. Sometimes the body sleeps while the mind is awake, sometimes the other way. It seemed as if the dim figure of

the guide swaying in front was part of a dream that had been going on from the beginning of time, and as if an eternity had been spent riding by—

> Plains that the moonlight turns to sea,
> Mountains that never let you near.

At last the twinkle of a camp-fire, and we awoke to find we were still an hour's ride from camp. When we got in we were surprised to find it was not yet midnight, but that day had included eighteen hours of hard work at an extreme altitude, which for a lady may be accounted no mean performance.

I was on the ground early next day. The bull which had crossed the pass was followed and found dead a mile beyond it. The other had wandered on and was not seen again.

After all, a great part of the difficulty of shooting yak lies not so much in the stalk as in reaching yak ground, for they are being driven farther east into the interior of Tibet every year. They used to be found in the district of Changchenmo in Ladak, but now, except for an occasional stray herd of cows, they are never seen there. The writer's expeditions after yak were shortly before the expedition to Lhassa, when the hated Piling (European) was

forbidden by the Tibetans to cross the frontier. The frontier people's orders, which it must be admitted were humane, were first to persuade the stranger and his followers to go back. If they will not hear persuasion, to threaten; if they do not care for threats, to beat them with sticks, and seizing them, convey them across the frontier (away, memories of the Criterion "chucker-out"!); but if they defend themselves by using guns, to use guns also, but not till at least one Tibetan has been killed. Judging from my own experience of that time, which included one very awkward business near Gartok, my advice would have been to avoid the Changpas. Now, it is said, the latter have lost some of their antipathy to strangers, and the difficulty in entering their country is of another kind. In any case, it is as well to remember that the way to a Tibetan's heart is through grain. A mule-load of barley will be more efficacious in persuading Changpas to become unaware of your presence than silver.

May I be permitted to give a word of advice to those who contemplate an expedition after yak. Do not go on shooting yak after having bagged the four or five you may really want. Though the animal is a magnificent one in his shaggy uncouth way, neither head nor tail are



A dead yak.



Wardens of the Tibetan marshes, Gartok.

really fine trophies, and it would be a thousand pities if he were to meet the fate of elimination which has overtaken so many of the finest breeds of wild oxen of other lands. Not that this is at present likely or possible. All the damage that is in the power of the most wanton to inflict is to help to drive them from the districts adjoining Kashmir, as they have been driven from Kashmir territory itself into the far interior of what still remains "the forbidden land," but this would be pity enough.

For humanity's sake: use a heavy rifle and not a small-bore.

For your stomach's sake: when you kill a yak, keep the tongue and likewise the marrow bones for your own table, and let your followers have the rest. They will be incapable of marching the next day—but you too, perhaps, will not mind what is known in the East as "a Europe morning."

DEER-STALKING IN KASHMIR.

WHO will ever forget the occasion when he first heard a stag's roar? What a thrill the sound gave him, and how his blood went racing with the knowledge of the beast's mere proximity! Life seemed eminently liveable at that moment. Even the first view of a stag scarcely affords so unalloyed a pleasure—for who is there among us that will not confess to at least a qualm at that crisis in his life as to how he will acquit himself, when the rifle has to be held in hands that do not shake, and the trigger pressed with a finger that does not convulsively indicate the state of his nerves? Again, the first stag one sees may be, probably is, a small one; but the first roar, so loud, so deep, one can never conceive issuing from any but the throat of a monarch. Such, at least, was my conviction as I rode one September evening up to my tent below the Tral Forest, and heard the weird sounds come stealing down from the wooded mountains

above—that half-grunt, half-bellow, with the suspicion of a squeal about it, with which the Kashmir stag issues his challenge.

My camp was near the hamlets which nestle below the forest, among orchards and vineyards and those groves of magnificent walnut- and plane-trees for which the lovely vale of Kashmir is famed. I could look up at my shooting ground whence came those thrilling sounds, and see tier upon tier of hills clothed with alders and willows, birches, hazels, and chestnuts, all golden with the tints of autumn. Here and there dark-green patches showed clumps of fir-trees, and these grew more numerous the higher one looked, till at the crest-line they merged into a dark belt, cut up by straggling arms of yellow. Roar soon began to answer roar, and those were the last sounds I heard before sleep came and dreams of monster stags. Next morning all was silent. As my Kashmiri stalker led the way uphill, through woods dripping with dew, and grassy glades, it was pure delight to snuff the keen, crisp air, and to catch the pungent odours of autumn. After an hour's climb we reached a ridge, beyond which a wide grassy corrie opened, a sort of amphitheatre, surrounded by forest. We had not spied this for more than a fraction of a minute before Ramzana, in a very excited state,

whispered, "Look, *sahib*, a stag and two hinds!" "Where?" I whispered. "Straight opposite," he said; "they are visible to the naked eye." I was looking at the ground close in front of me, expecting from Ramzana's excitement to see them quite near. Suddenly I felt his fingers close about the nape of my neck. "There, *sahib*, there — there — there!" he said, jerking my head forward in the required direction.

Very fortunately for him, just at that moment I did catch sight of the beasts; otherwise, the humour of the situation could scarcely have saved him. I have often since laughed at the remembrance of his cold, strong fingers round my neck, and wondered if my peaceful submission encouraged him to try his original method with other *sahibs*—and with what result. Anyhow, the fact remains that my resentment was forgotten in the excitement of examining the deer. The stag and hinds were not near, but some 500 or 600 yards off, close to the forest. He was a ten-pointer and a good one, but the stalk seemed difficult. Though the wind was right, the ground in front was open, and a hare could not have crossed it without being seen. The beasts were, on the other hand, so close to the wood that if we tried a stalk that way, it was

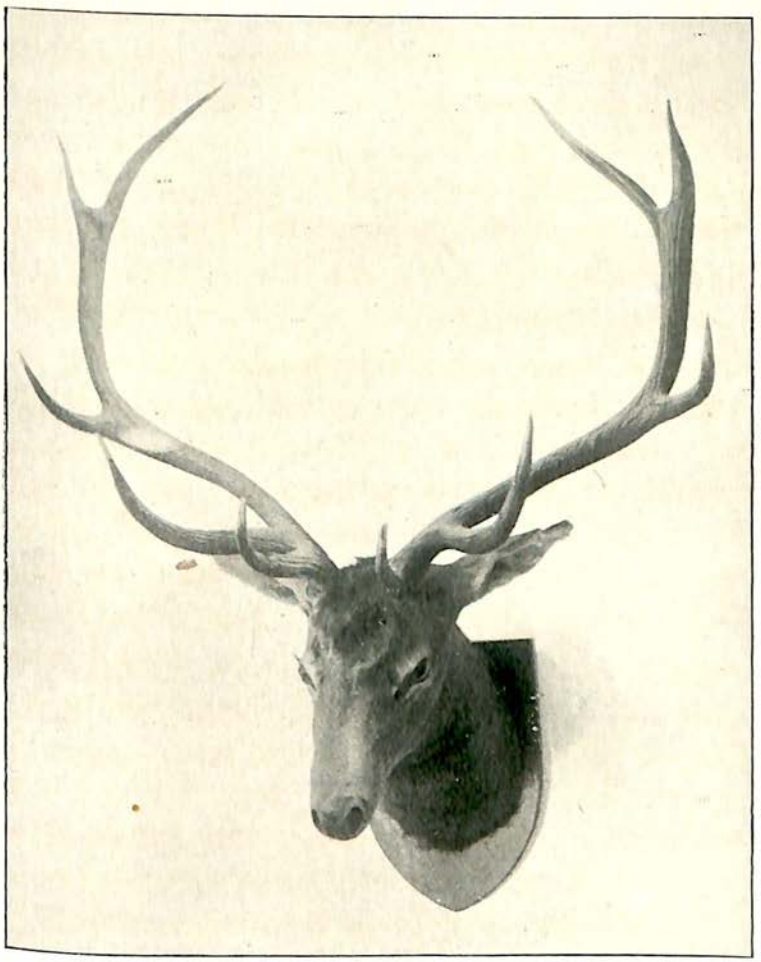
a hundred to one they would hear us on the dry leaves.

A whispered consultation between Ramzana and his son resulted in the latter being despatched up the hill to work round and move them. After the best part of an hour—or, at any rate, a period that seemed like that—up went the beasts' heads, and they gazed fixedly at the forest behind them, and then began moving slowly our way, making as if they would cross our ridge a couple of hundred yards or so above us. So we, too, went up and prepared for their reception. I got comfortable lying down, my rifle by my side, and watched them coming slowly along. If nothing should put them away now I was certain of a shot. I had with me two rifles, a double ·500, the worth of which had been proved in the jungles of Central India, and a new Mannlicher which I was anxious to try. The latter was a splendid shooting weapon, that I knew, but its bullet looked so ridiculously small that I had no hesitation in selecting the old rifle for my first Kashmir stag.

The beast came straight on. Two hundred yards only separated us. Now it is a hundred and fifty. Who has ever the patience to wait long enough in such circumstances? The stag turns half broadside on, stands a moment and

looks back. As I fire he gives a bound, seemingly hit, and begins going slowly uphill. My second bullet is high. Now he is two hundred yards or more away, a distance at which a black powder ·500 cannot be relied on, but going so slowly that I feel sure it is only a matter of a few yards before he will be down. Happy thought; the Mannlicher as a cripple stopper! It is loaded, so I raise the Lyman sight a trifle and fire.

Before the echoes have died the stag stops, staggers, and comes tumbling down the hill. In another quarter of a minute we were examining our quarry—a heavy beast, with massive antlers both rough and black, and points hard and white as ivory. "By the way, Ramzana, where did my first bullet hit him?" We turned the beast over. There was the Mannlicher hole right enough, small and clean, no exit. The bullet had broken into smithereens inside him as it should, but our careful examination showed no wound by the big bullet. My first shot had missed him clean, that was evident, and I realised with a sort of shock how near I had been to losing my first stag altogether! But how about the bound he gave when I fired, and his slow pace away? It was certainly odd, but might be explained by the wind of the bullet and the beast dazed by the report, and not certain of



The ten-pointer.

the line to take. The thing happens now and again, as every deer-stalker will bear witness.

The Kashmir red deer is a very similar animal to the better-known Scotch variety; the two, in fact, would be identical but for the difference in the sound of the roar, which presumably indicates a structural difference in the larynx, and the greater size of the Kashmir beast. The latter is a forest-loving animal (perhaps Scotch deer were too, once upon a time), and this alters the form of sport. It is, as a rule, only in the evening that they emerge from their secluded retreats, often too late for a stalk, and they are back again before the sun grows hot on the hillsides. So, as still hunting is quite impossible during the autumn, the sportsman has to be early. He then hopes to pick up beasts at once, for little ground can be covered before it becomes too late to find deer in the open, and then nothing remains for him but to select a comfortable spot in which to pass the day. This is the tedious part of the business. But, after all, the man who has to while away some hours under a Kashmir sky, surrounded by Kashmir scenes of mountain and forest, lake and stream, is not much to be commiserated. That, however, is a matter of temperament, and a book is certainly a desideratum with most. Then there is

always the chance of seeing a black bear come nosing out into the open, or exhibit himself on the top of some distant tree, birds to watch, and nature in a thousand other forms. About three o'clock the first roar resounds from the forest. The book is put away and glasses pulled out. The sound is repeated at intervals, answered maybe by others, and you find yourself already calculating the size of the beast. The sun sinks westward with astonishing rapidity, the shadows creep along the hillsides, and a chill comes into the air, but still the deer do not show themselves. There is barely time for a stalk now. How impatient you grow! Suddenly your shikari nudges you, and you become aware of deer feeding in the open, where a deep shadow is cast by a clump of fir-trees; but by the time you have fully made them out, the stalker has disappeared at a run, snapping his glasses as he goes, and you follow.

A word here about the Kashmir shikari. All have splendid physique and, as a matter of course, wonderful eyesight. As stalkers they are good, though not to my mind the equal of the men one gets further north "beyond the Passes," —Gilgitis, Chitralis, and Ladakis, at any rate on strange ground. They know the habits of deer well, and, in short, will get you as many shots

as is possible. But they are by no means faultless. The preference of the inhabitants of the famous vale for speaking "the thing that is not" rather than "the thing that is" is notorious, and the shikari is no exception to the general rule. He has also a particularly aggravating way, and one it is difficult to persuade him to drop, of treating his *sahib* as a mere shooting automaton. The reader may perhaps remember Froude's description of the French King who loved to imitate Providence, "especially in the secrecy of his methods, with scant success, and often the most unfortunate results; for secrecy," the historian went on to observe, "can only be successfully employed by an intelligence that does not err." This puts in a nutshell the average Kashmiri shikari's attitude towards his employer, and with that we will leave him.

Unlike Scotland in this respect, the winter stalking in Kashmir is a superior sport to that obtained when the stags are roaring. One winter not long ago I was out many days after a reputed fourteen-pointer. I would get news that he had been seen in a certain glen, and thither I would betake myself as quickly as might be. The nights were spent in some Kashmiri hamlet,—not the most savoury of quarters,—and I would be out on the hard snow before daybreak. This was the best part of the day,

for soon after the sun had risen and bestrewn the surface with a million sparkling gems, the crust became soft and walking a toil. Unlike the autumn stalking, in the winter one can be at work all day. The forests, now bare of leaf, can be spied from the opposite sides of the valleys, and in these one may see the deer lying down or moving about, and queer it is to see how big stags force their way through the thickest cover, their antlers, thrown right back on their haunches, seeming to impede them but little. On one occasion we had spied some deer moving towards the open, and were preparing to be present at the point where they would emerge, when the dark form of a panther glided across the snow and stopped on the very spot we had marked for ourselves, and there lay like a cat on the watch. Unfortunately, a path to a neighbouring village ran near, and a too melodious passer-by put him away before we could get near enough for a shot.

I got some good beasts that year, but the fourteen-pointer was not among them. In fact, I never saw him, and the mendacity of Kashmiri shikaris is such that it is by no means certain that he existed. Not that stags with fourteen points are never shot in Kashmir. Since the game laws were introduced several carrying this number of points have been shot, notably a magnificent specimen which fell to

the rifle of the Maharajah's brother, the late Sir Amar Singh, and there is no doubt that stags with big heads are getting more numerous every year.

That winter I did come across one very fine stag. This was towards the end of March, a good month for stalking, as the deer come out into the open after the young grass and crocuses, and the history of my meetings with that slippery beast must conclude this sketch. His haunt was a steep forest, extending for a mile or so below a high hog's-back, the top of which was serrated in such a way that from no point on it could more than a few yards of the ridge be watched. The other side of the hog's-back a number of deep, grassy ravines fell steeply down to the plain a couple of thousand feet below.

We first spied the royal, for such he was, accompanied by a small ten-pointer, below us in the forest, but the snow, which lay deep on this, the north side, was crisp and difficult to get over silently; dry branches cracked with a terrible noise, while others, bent down with the weight of snow, sprang suddenly up as we crawled through them. Of course, the stalk was a failure. When next we saw them, a couple of days later, they were in the same place. This time we decided on a drive, and having collected my baggage porters, the shikari took them into one end of the

forest, while I placed myself on the top of a "bealleach," by which the beasts would cross to the next valley. It was the right place. I soon saw deer moving towards me. First some hinds came by. When quite close they saw me, and with a start of alarm galloped by. Then a switch-horn stag. I was tempted to take him, but let him go for fear of turning the royal. Presently a confused murmur and shouting reached me. I saw the black figures of beaters running over the snow, and guessed our stag had broken back. It was so. Looking with the glasses I saw him and his satellite, the ten-pointer, just clear of the forest the far end, and going hard, and in a moment they were lost to view.

After a few days both were back in their old haunt. Before reaching our spying place we had walked along the ridge, and in doing so had come on tracks in the snow, showing that the two stags had crossed over the evening before for the grass on the south side and had returned early in the morning. We did not actually pick them up that day till late in the afternoon, when we saw them moving up towards the ridge, evidently intending to cross it. Returning there, we sat down to wait for them. It has already been said that there was no point on the ridge from which the whole could be watched, and of course the place

we chose was not the one our beasts selected to cross.

After waiting till nearly dark, we went along the ridge looking for tracks, and to our deep disgust found that the stags had already crossed at a point not sixty yards from where I had been sitting. We ran like mad down the hill after them, and came on them far down, thoroughly enjoying themselves in the lush grass. Alas, it was too dark to risk a shot, and we climbed back without alarming them. Next morning (it was the 1st of April) we were on the ridge long before the sun, but they had recrossed before us. We went on to our spying points, and after some time made them out far down in the forest. Presently they lay down. A hurried consultation was held. It was, I must repeat, the 1st of April, and any day now that royal might shed his antlers. Something had to be done. He was too cute to be driven, and waiting on the ridge in the evening was too uncertain. A stalk, difficult as it seemed in that dense, dry forest, was our only plan. This time I took my double cordite rifle with solid bullets, as more reliable than the Mannlicher, for the latter's bullets break up on touching a twig.

We slided and crawled down a deep snow-filled gully, taking extraordinary care. Every twig that

cracked sent our hearts into our mouths; once we went down twenty feet in a rush with a small avalanche of snow. Over a ridge and across another gully, up another ridge, and we hoped to be within shot of our quarry. Slowly we raised our heads. Nothing. Too high up. Back we crawled and repeated the manœuvre lower down. A dark mass is visible through some undergrowth, about seventy yards away. We move a few yards to get a clearer view. A stag lying down, his antlers almost concealed among the branches. I take a good look through my glasses. "See if that's the one," I whisper; "he seems to me more like the small one." The shikari puts the glasses to his eyes and looks long and carefully. As he is looking the stag sharply turns his head. "That's the one, *sahib;* take him!" I rest the rifle against a tree, aim at the middle of the brown, and fire. The stag springs to his feet, takes a few convulsive bounds, and falls. Mine at last!

Knife in hand, the shikari plunges down the intervening gully and up the opposite side to perform the *hallal.* I stand up, a pleasant relief after being on all-fours the best part of two hours, and begin putting the rifle in its cover. A shout comes from the stalker, and I note an absence of joy in it. Something wrong?

"What?" I yell.

The answer comes, and I catch the words "got changed."

"What do you mean?"

It is clearer this time. "*Hai, hai, sahib*, you shot the wrong one! *Tobah! tobah!*"

It *was* the ten-pointer after all! The royal was, of course, gone, and I never saw him again. I had left a man to spy from the top, and he afterwards told me the big beast had been lying only ten or fifteen yards below the other. Such is sport! "The little more how much it is! The little less how far away!"


LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

A CANVAS CANOE.

WHEN the "Alys" was launched there were no cheering crowds, no display of bunting, and no ladies' gay dresses. No champagne flowed, nor even, I think, honest Scotch whisky. It was in truth a very quiet proceeding. We had been in pursuit of ibex and wild geese at the head waters of the Yarkhun river, following up which to its source we came on the sheet of water known to Wakhis as Kul-Sar. A wonderful spectacle opened before us as we topped the snow-covered ridge that had hidden the lake from us whilst we climbed the last few miles of the ascent. The lake lay glittering at our feet, indescribably beautiful. Light breezes played over the greater part of its sapphire surface, but in one bay that was protected by a long black headland, the inverted image of a giant snow mountain lay almost as still as the original. Great rugged mountains bordered the water on all sides, except for a depression in the range where, in the far distance, the blue water found



The head waters of the Yarkhun river.

an exit into the Karumbar river. No touch of colour relieved the black and white of rock and snow, except on the margin of the lake where the early snow had melted, and strips of green showed us the summer grass had not yet faded. To these we directed our glasses, in the hope that white dots would reveal the wild geese we were in quest of; but never a one was visible, nor after a prolonged examination were wild-fowl of any description to be seen on the whole broad bosom of the lake. It was too late in the year, no doubt, and the geese and duck, which breed here in the summer, had migrated southward. Some of the narrower arms of the lake which the wind did not touch were already coated with a steel-blue film of ice, and though the month was only October, the wind from Wakhan which blew after sunset, the piercing nature of which has passed into a proverb in these parts, was enough to freeze one's very marrow. Still, geese or no geese, the "Alys" was to be launched. Built in Canada of pine and canvas, so light a single man could carry her, she had come by sea to Bombay, by train to Peshawar, on mule-back to Chitral, and thence on men's shoulders to our lake of Kul-Sar, a basin hollowed by glaciers, 15,000 feet above the ocean. Here she was to emerge at last from her chrysalis; and in truth this start in her career was peculiarly appropriate,

for as it was the first time she ever rested on deep water, so it was the first time the still waters of Lake Kul-Sar had ever been cut by mortal-made keel; though whether or no the witch of Atlas ever glided here in her phantom craft, who can say?

> The pinnace passed
> By many a star-surrounded pyramid
> Of icy crag cleaving the purple sky
> And caverns yawning round unfathomably.

So it was Chitrali hands that for the first time unlaced her outer cover and helped to fit keel and ribs into their places and gradually fill out her canvas skin till she assumed the proportions of a Canadian canoe. And it was a man of Wakhan whom we asked to lift up her bows while we took the stern and slid her gently into the water. Neither Chitralis nor Wakhis had ever seen a boat before, even in their dreams, and when she floated lightly on the water on even keel they said so loudly; and finally, when I paddled out into the lake, mere words were inadequate to describe their surprise and wonder, and they could only ejaculate loud cries of "Ya Allah, ya Allah!" If those Wakhis were the true travellers I take them to be, what tales the Russians across the borders must have heard! Nothing less, I feel convinced, than



Yarkhun river.

the advent of a British flotilla up the Chitral river.

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A few weeks later I was crossing the Shandur Pass on the way to Gilgit. The Pass consists of a broad plain some 12,000 feet above the sea, one side of which is taken up by a lake four or five miles in length, frequented during the autumn by geese and wild-fowl.

In winter it is, of course, fathoms deep in snow, and it was in this state that Colonel Kelly and his gallant men crossed it in '95 on their famous march to Chitral. I was walking round the farther shore accompanied by my old stalker, Gul Sher, in the hopes of a shot. Mounting a narrow promontory which ran out into the lake, we peered over and saw a gaggle of six or eight geese preening themselves on the grassy margin, and not eighty yards away. A chance for the four-bore and no mistake. The ponderous weapon was pushed over a rock and levelled, and with a setting of teeth and bracing of muscles—for a single four-bore burning ten drachms is no plaything—the trigger was pulled. The flash and roar was over, and I had survived the stunning kick that made the *Topkhana* (artillery field-piece), as Gul Sher used to call it, a gun for only great occasions, and three geese were flapping on

the ground. The remainder got up, and wheeling round towards us came honking along within shot. Two barrels from the twelve-bore dropped another dead; but in the meantime one of the cripples, which had regained the water, went sailing out into the middle of the lake. The "Alys" was handy, however, and putting her together we started in pursuit. We beat the "barhead" at the paddling, and it was not long before another charge of number three saw him gyrating in the water head downwards, and next moment hauled on board and deposited in the stern.

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The Shandur Lake is one of the sources of the Gilgit river. Starting from the eastern end, a tiny stream trickles out, falls a thousand feet in four miles or so, and then winds along an open valley covered with dwarf willow jungle. The stream then falls rapidly again to Ghizar, twenty-five miles from the lake, where it can be called for the first time a river. Foaming through this little mountain principality, it enters a large, flat, grassy plain, at the farther end of which is a smaller lake called Pandur. At one time or another the whole plain was a sheet of water formed by an enormous dam, which had been thrust across the river-bed by a glacier protruding from the right. At the present time the river



Shandur Lake.

winds sluggishly along from side to side of the plain. Its banks are fringed with a dense jungle of dwarf willow, through which it is almost impossible to force one's way. On previous journeys up the valley I had seen flights of duck follow the course of the river and go down somewhere out of sight, but owing to the jungle aforesaid it was an impossibility to get a shot at them. With the help of the "Alys" these duck were now to be circumvented. A screen of reeds was arranged round the bows, through which peeped the long barrel of *Topkhana*. I sat behind the big gun, the twelve-bore handy, Gul Sher behind me—there was just room for two—wielding the paddle. And so we started.

Considering this was the first time the shikari had ever sat in anything nearer akin to a boat than an Indus raft of inflated skins, and this was a canoe that wobbled, he managed well. We shipped a little water when we stuck on a sand-bank in the middle of a small rapid, but finding no harm resulted, he quickly gained confidence and became almost skilful. The current soon brought us among the jungle, where we hoped to find a gathering of duck. Silence was essential, and we floated slowly down, only keeping the canoe's head straight with an occasional stroke of the paddle. As we rounded a corner some

duck came overhead, but I was not quick enough to get on them; and, indeed, if the reader has ever sat in a canoe he will know that a shot to the right is an impossibility, and in any other direction quite difficult enough. Some teal next came by, sixty miles an hour, with a like result. This was not cheering; but the sight for which we hoped was a big gathering of duck on the water, and then a raking shot with the four-bore into the middle of them, and this was not long in coming. At the next turn, a dark line across the water, three or four hundred yards ahead, showed with the glasses a big gathering of mallard. The four-bore was cocked, and we slowly bore down on them. Soon we could see the duck, not thoroughly alarmed, but swimming strongly away from us. Then they apparently made up their minds to let the strange mass of weeds float by them, for they huddled under the willows on the bank in a dense mass. We were not more than a hundred yards from them, and in another twenty yards I intended to let drive. I will admit that I was not convinced that the firing of the four-bore would not capsize the canoe; and though he uttered not a word, it appeared that there were similar doubts in Gul Sher's mind. The mistake was that when I pulled the trigger the canoe was not end on with the line of fire.

Anyhow, there came the usual fearful explosion and kick, the canoe gave an awful lurch, up went my heels into the air, and I found myself lying on my back, and the canoe nearly full of water. She was still floating, however. Gul Sher had extracted the twelve-bore from the bottom of the canoe, and was pouring the water out of the barrels.

But the duck? Not a single one lay dead on the water, and not even a cripple. I had evidently shot over the whole lot. The exclamation that left my lips is not to be recorded. Wet and unhappy, we baled out the boat and paddled on.

"We nearly upset that time," I remarked.

"Yes, *sahib*," replied Gul Sher; "but I just managed to save us."

"You!" I said. "Why, if you had kept the canoe's head straight it would never have happened."

"That may be, *sahib*," he replied; "but I knew that when you fired the *Topkhana*, unless I held the boat very tight we should upset, *so I lay down the paddle and held both sides with all my might*, and thanks to that we are still afloat. But it was a very near thing," he added.

It was a day of disasters. Farther on I missed a single gadwal that came over us. At the Pandur Lake we took the canoe out of the water to go to camp, as there was nothing there in the wild-

fowl way. But as we were climbing up the big boulder-covered dam, the faint metallic note of wild geese made us look up. A skein of geese were flying high in the heavens. Catching sight of the water below them they suddenly dropped their long necks, and with a rush of pinions came swooping and diving straight downwards. The sky was dark with clouds behind them, but the setting sun lit the great birds up, making them flash like silver against the gloom. The effect was one a Japanese artist might have transferred to canvas, but no one else. Murderous thoughts prevailed, however, and we stalked them; but their wary eyes must have caught sight of a cap or bent back among the rocks, for they got up a long way off, and *Topkhana* again belched forth his three and a half ounces of B.B. in vain.

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The next act in the career of the "Alys" was far from this, on the Tibetan border. She had, in the meantime, been carried to Srinagar, where she had floated on the picturesque water-street of this eastern city of gondolas, and from there to Leh, whence she had accompanied me on a trip to Tibet. Returning from this, my way lay by the Indus, here a slow stream meandering from side to side in a wide sandy plain. After weeks of continual riding with the caravan, it



The Alys.



The river street of Srinagar.

was pleasant to lie back in the little canoe, umbrella over my head, and be towed along and listen to the rippling of the water against the bows. The plain was covered with coarse scanty grass imprinted with innumerable hoof-marks of *kyang* (or wild asses), but from the canoe only the great mountains surrounding the plain could be seen, apparently swinging and revolving round me as the river wandered backwards and forwards. Now and again a sandbank would intrude, and I was aroused from far-away thoughts to seize the paddle. Sometimes the leaders would signal geese, and I would get out to see distant specks of white quivering and heaving on the bank in the dry clear air, and the big gun would be got out for a shot, not usually in vain.

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The shore of the Pangong Lake is the next spot where I will ask my readers to picture the "Alys" stripped of her covering. My wife and I had been for a trip over the Tibetan frontier, and after shooting yak and antelope had wandered south-west past Lake Tso Dyak, over 16,000 feet above the sea. Here also the "Alys" cruised, the highest piece of water she (or any other boat?) has ever floated on. Continuing our march from there, we struck the Pangong east of the

old ruined watch-tower of Karnak. We had been seeing mountains before us all day, seemingly only a few miles distant, which I recognised as being beyond the lake; but distances in that moistureless air are beyond belief deceiving, and it was not till late in the evening that we heard the welcome trumpeting of geese, saw patches of green grass, and finally emerged on the lake side, where we pitched our tents. The next day I went a long way inland after *Ovis ammon*. When I returned I found the "Alys" had undergone a transformation, for, not to speak of a new coat of paint, a mast had been stepped and a sail rigged up, with which to take advantage of the morning east wind on our voyage homewards —an improvement not originally contemplated by the makers.

The Pangong Lake is a serpentine sheet of water, 14,000 feet above sea-level. Of its eighty or hundred miles of length, half is in Tibet proper and the remaining westerly half in Ladak. There are really two lakes, but these are connected in the middle by a winding canal-like waterway, opening here and there into lagoons, in most parts not more than thirty feet across. The eastern lake is fresh water, but in the western the water is worse than salt—bitter. Our camp that night was a few miles to the east of the

junction, so there we had the fresh water to drink; but our next camp on the way back to Ladak was to be a fresh spring on the shore of the other lake, an unknown distance off. Except at the occasional fresh springs, where for a few yards' grass grew luxuriantly, the whole country was barren, without vegetation of any sort. Inhabitants there were none, and but for the occasional sight of Tibetan nomads one might travel for weeks and not see a soul.

Starting off before daybreak, we slipped along before the breeze and made for the opening of the "canal," whilst our caravan of ponies was toiling in a long line round the bay. That was a great day for geese. We found them in large flocks in the lagoons, and in twos and threes on the banks of the "canal." One triumphant shot into a gaggle, which the lady in the canoe skilfully manœuvred up to me as I lay concealed in the reeds, secured six. Some mergansers, too, swam for miles in front of the canoe, and when they were tired of that dived down and reappeared behind us.

What with looking after the geese and a short halt for lunch, it was not till late in the afternoon that we got through the narrow waterway and paddled out into the bitter lake. The caravan had long since left us behind, and how

far on the fresh spring was we had not an idea. The breeze now blew in our faces, and as our round-bottomed canoe could only sail before the wind, we hitched on the tow-rope. About evening the wind dropped entirely, and as the sun sank behind the distant mountains it was a dead calm. More weirdly beautiful days than these we spent sailing, towing, and paddling down the great lake, I have never seen. The barren mountains round were themselves of every shade of bizarre-colouring, the near ones standing out startlingly bright and vivid, with every stone and rock throwing a perfect image on the clear water, the distant ones exhibiting blues and purples of every exquisite shade, and of the kind only seen where mountains are arid and waterless. One might have imagined oneself sailing down the Red Sea, but with the purple mountains of Baluchistan on either side.

We had hoped to reach camp by sundown, but night fell and the moon rose behind us, throwing a wavering reflection of itself in the wake of the canoe, and we were still towing on. We now kept as far out as possible, for fear of snags under the surface that would rip up our canvas walls like paper. By-and-by we neared a long promontory running far out into the lake, behind which our guide told us was a fresh

spring, and our camping-ground. So a portage was decided on, and we struck inland, up a wide valley, and, leaving that, across what seemed an endless plain. The lake no longer was in sight. Now and again we heard the sound of galloping hoofs, and caught a glimpse of a startled herd of *kyang* disappearing in the dim light. After going a couple of hours or so, our guide seemed uncertain of his direction: track there was none, so we turned left again to fetch the lake side, where at any rate we knew it was simply a matter of time finding the camp; so we went stumbling along over the sand-dunes, till in time the lake appeared once more, shimmering below us, and we could see the moon-lit mountains on the other side and the moon's bright path across the waters. Almost at the same time the distant but welcome twinkle of a camp-fire somewhere near the shore, but almost behind us, told us our change of direction had been none too soon. Otherwise we might have wandered the night long through these desolate wilds and been farther from our camp at the end than at the beginning.

Next day there was a spanking breeze, and we stood out into the middle of the lake for a run down. But, clear of the headland, we got more wind than we had bargained for. The

waves quickly rose to a great height, and it was with difficulty we could keep the canoe from broaching to, for the "Alys," buoyant little craft that she was—"the foam upon the waters not so light"—was innocent of keel. To run for the shore was impossible, as we should have to a certainty foundered in the trough of waves which were sweeping down the length of the lake. A couple of miles on loomed a headland, behind which, if we could get there, would be comparatively smooth water, and for this we steered. The gale increased, and the great waves following threatened to poop the little canoe every minute. We had a good deal of way on, however, and the noise of the waves dashing against the rocky point was soon faintly audible. Getting nearer, and shutting one's eyes, one could have imagined oneself back somewhere off the cliffs of old England; only the cries of the gulls were wanting to make the illusion complete. We passed within a few feet of "the needles," a few strokes of the paddle brought us into smooth water, and we could look back and laugh at our escape from the locker of whichever of the Tibetan godlings corresponds to "old Davy."

The wind as usual dropped when the sun got high in the sky, and we towed through the



Evening on the Pangong Lake.

afternoon, only paddling across deep indentations in the coast. What a queer sight we should have presented on an English towing-path! First, the long line of little baggage-ponies with their pig-tailed drivers scrambling along the loose rocks which lined the shore. In places the cliffs descended sheer into the water, and the ponies were taken a cut inland, but generally there was a sort of natural towing-path, which could be traced all round the lake some fifteen feet above water. It was the water-line of some past period, very rough, and covered with angular fragments of rock, but practicable for Ladaki ponies, who are as nimble as goats. Next came our towers, a couple of Ladaki men, usually riding, wearing cloaks of sheepskin about their waists. Lastly the "Alys" and ourselves in her, slipping along in deep blue water twenty or thirty feet out. I call the water blue, for generally it was sapphire-hued as the Mediterranean; but now and then we passed over patches where the nature of the lake-bed changed it into all wonderful shades of gleaming green, but so transparent that, when calm, one could see the boulder-covered bottom at great depths; but it was a dead sea, without weeds or fish or any signs of organic life. Some of the rocks of which the cliffs were composed were themselves of a dark-green colour, a

species of serpentine, while here and there the sandy bays would be littered with crystals and bright-coloured pebbles. We had another day's run in the little "Alys" before we reached the end of the lake and the first signs of human habitations we had seen for six weeks, and here she was taken out of the water, her dark green almost unrecognisable from incrustations of salts, but otherwise none the worse for her journey in unexplored waters.

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In the Bhil country of Dungarpur, far away from the Himalayas, a fortified Rajput city nestles among the jungle-covered hills. Hills these in the true sense of the word, and not as commonly used by the Anglo-Indians when speaking of the vast northern ramparts of India. On one side a big lake forms the defences of the city, the bastioned walls terminating on the water's edge. Palm-trees, temples, palaces, old ruined tombs, make up the glowing picture of an Eastern city. A wide flight of steps leads up from the lake into the market-place, and on this the scarlet skirts of women drawing water show vivid patches of colour. Pea-fowl wander about unnoticed, and snake-birds sit with wings extended like bronze images on the sacred cupola in the middle of the lake. An elephant lying flat on his side in the water, his

head half submerged, is being scrubbed by his attendants. The far end of the lake is fringed with jungle and grass, "with reeds and rushes," and in this, one glorious cold-weather evening, not long ago, the writer was sitting watching a mass of duck some way out from the shore. Presently from the other side a lady appeared, and with her two men carrying the "Alys" ready for action. The manœuvre was obvious. She was stepping into the canoe when, from the palace near by, the little Rajput king of the place came hurrying, and begged to be taken on board. His retainers panting after him arrived in time to hear the request. They looked at the frail craft, then looked at the fair lady, and were horrified. Horrified was the fat tutor in pink, horrified the Prime Minister in canary yellow, still more horrified the marriage ambassador from a neighbouring State, in grass green. One and all begged him to desist from his rash design and to "draw the feet of temerity under the skirt of prudence." Threats were even held out of the displeasure of the dowager mother. But these were all in vain, and the "Alys" bore the hopes of a nation from the shore. Though it was not in a blue-blooded Rajput to show fear, he evidently thought it more than possible that the weedy bottom and crocodiles would be the result of his rashness.

"Do you think it will drown?" he asked the lady, when out of earshot of the shore. She did her best to reassure him, and evidently with some success, to judge by the next remark he let drop after settling himself comfortably in the stern, "Madam, this is very pleasant." Prince and lady were now nearing the duck, which were getting up in swarms and circling round the lake, and the bang-banging and flop of falling duck showed that he in the jungle was also having a pleasant evening.

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But one more scene in the career of the "Alys Many years ago an Indian Maharajah, who ruled over a big tract of country in Rajputana, observed a river running through a gap in a range of hills. It struck him that if the gap were filled in a fine lake would be formed, where he could build himself a *plaisance*. So the order was passed, and men dug and carried baskets of earth and plumped them down in the gap. After some hundreds of thousands or millions of baskets of earth had been deposited, the river was dammed and spread out into a huge lake, with islands and promontories and long arms of water stretching out among the jungle-covered hills. The great *barrage* was then paved with blocks of white stone and retaining walls were built up on both sides; a marble temple

was added, and little summer palaces of wonderful Indian architecture were dotted here and there on the surrounding hills where the best views of the lake could be obtained. It was here the "Alys" next saw the light. Our host the Resident's camp was on the top of the *barrage*, while the Maharajah's successor stopped in one of the white summer-houses. He was a keen sportsman and tiger-slayer, and each day of our stay there was devoted to drives for tiger and panther or the lordly sambur, or expeditions on the lake after the wild-fowl which frequented the farther end in thousands. There were other boats on the lake, but where these could not go the "Alys" could, and sometimes afforded us a shot at geese we should not otherwise have had. But wild was no word for them!

Imagine, then, the start on such an expedition, while the cool morning breezes were still fanning the lake. As we approached, the great white pelicans, sailing majestically on the water like a fleet of warships, would first rise and slowly circle round the lake. Farther on, regiments of gleaming flamingoes, standing knee-deep on a sandbank, would spring into the air. The geese, with a roar of water lashed into foam by thousands of pinions, would be the next to get up, while the *sarus* cranes, in pairs as usual—emblems of conjugal

fidelity—waited till we were quite close before they, too, would stride along the surface of the water, to lift themselves with laboured flaps into the air and add their shrill, rasping cries to the clamour. The duck, in the meantime, would have been getting up on all sides with lesser roars, as the sound of small-arm firing to that of heavy guns, and would be flying swiftly to and fro over the lake to find less disturbed corners. Here, while the air is full of myriads of flying forms and resounds with the music of reedy Indian lake-lands, let the curtain fall over our canvas canoe.

IN THEORY AT ALL EVENTS.

It is some years ago now that I read, no matter where, a few brief but eloquent sentences setting forth the superior attractions of the camera over the rifle. The sentiments were worded with Ruskin-like charm, and found an answering echo in my bosom, so that I forthwith determined to lay aside for a time, if not for ever, the rifle, and in future depend on the camera for records of my glimpses of the wild inhabitants of forests and mountains. I had no previous experience of photography, but knew that an animal, taken at a fair sporting range of 200 yards or so, would not appear in the picture at all, or, if it did, would be so small that it would require a microscope to tell what it was. I therefore put myself in the hands of an eminent firm of photographic dealers, and confided to them my ambition. They thought it a most laudable one—naturally—and were full of suggestions. What they eventually recommended was a portable box camera, with "——'s Telephoto

Lens, combined with a ——. Slides, diaphragm, shutter, and other details might be left to them."

Their descriptions and promises left nothing to be desired, so I placed my order with them, and on my return to the remote station in the Himalaya where I happened to be quartered, found myself in possession of the complete apparatus, which cost me as much as two good rifles. Anxious to test the range and capabilities of my new instrument, I had out my old grey hill pony to practise on, and made the *syce* hold him at various ranges. Though a useful animal, and unsurpassed on a hill road, he was no beauty to look at, and my proceedings caused the *syce* the profoundest astonishment. As, however, the trials proceeded day by day, he began to look at the old pony with fresh interest, thinking, no doubt, that all did not depend on looks, and that there must be some quality in him the existence of which he had not hitherto suspected. As his cogitations had the effect of making him groom the pony more frequently than was his wont, I did not enlighten him as to my object.

The pictures were fairly successful. The definition was not quite sharp, but I put this down to the pony's nondescript colour. I could only hope that my ibex—this was the noble animal I had



The tops of the mountains.

determined to try my 'prentice hand on first—would stand as steady. When the time came for carrying my project into execution, I found I had somehow postponed taking my old shikari, Gul Sher, into my confidence; perhaps there was a lurking suspicion in my mind that he would not take the proper Ruskinian view of this form of sport; and when you come to think of it, to a man whose ideas of *shikar* were mainly connected with meat, it might appear to be "*a little too thick.*"

The morning for the start arrived, and still I had not unburdened my bosom to him, and finally, when he came into my quarters and began to take my ·256 from its case, and wipe it down preparatory to slinging it over his shoulder, I did not like to shock him by telling him to put it back, salving my conscience with the thought that it would be as well to make a show of going shooting, in order to humour the old man, as without a rifle he might flatly refuse to go out at all.

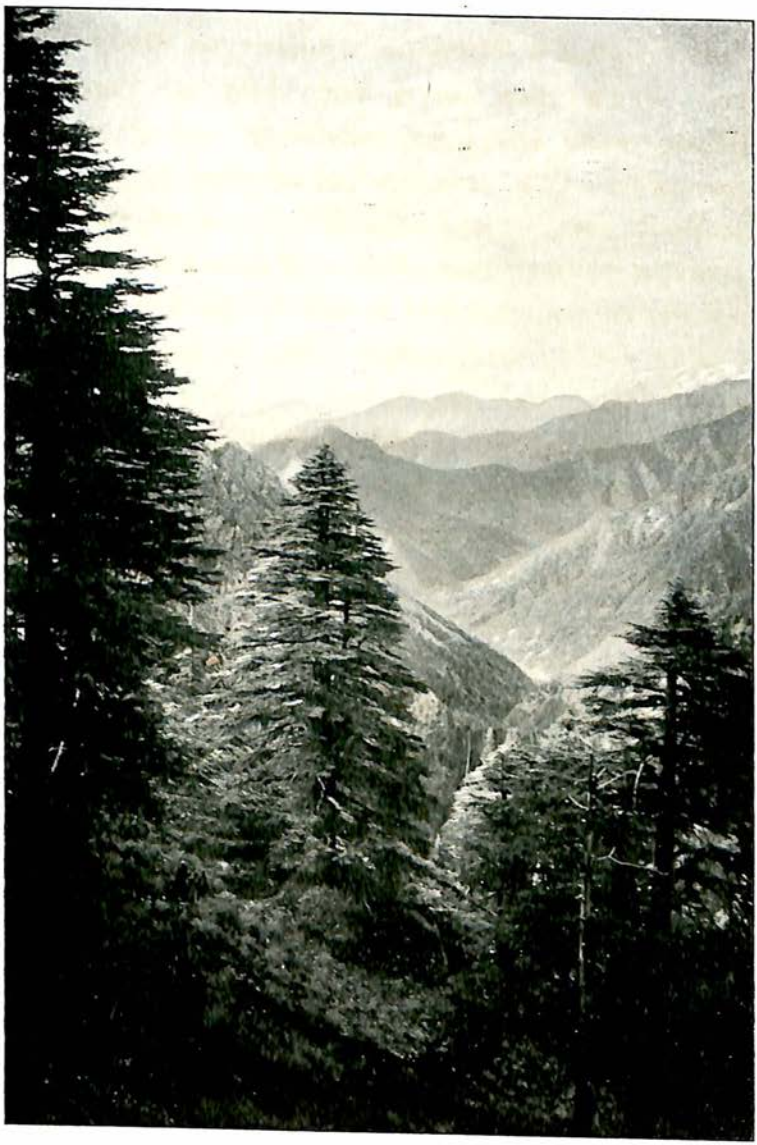
The month was July, and the ibex were on the very tops of the mountains, among the crags and aiguilles, whence they would only venture to descend in the mornings and evenings to crop the luscious verdure below them. Our path the first day ran along the side of a roaring torrent swollen by melted snow, the damp mist from which blew

delightfully cool in our faces during the heat of the day. The second day, passing through the belts of juniper and pine, we emerged about evening on an open slope, knee-deep in grass and flowery stars and bells, below the jagged crests of the range. We were approaching our camp, which had been sent on the previous day, when Gul Sher called my attention to the bulky leather case containing the camera, which was being carried by my "tiffin cooly," and asked what it was. Further concealment was impossible. I entered into an explanation as to how hundreds of *sahibs* had shot thousands of ibex, but no one had yet succeeded in taking a photograph of a wild ibex—a feat that was far more difficult, and therefore more meritorious.

"After having taken his picture, *sahib*, I suppose you shoot him?"

"Yes," I said, with the mental reservation, "if he's there."

"Of course," he replied, and so the conversation ended. He had let me down easier than I had expected. Next morning I and my shikari and a cooly carrying the photographic paraphernalia were up before light, and by the time rocks and trees began to be visible and the snow-peaks in the distance to glow with the light of early dawn, we were among the crags; looking down



Through belts of juniper and pine.

with our glasses into two ravines which came to a head below us, Gul Sher soon spotted in one of them a small herd of ibex consisting of two bucks and some does. They were not stalkable in their present position, but were grazing in the direction of the other *nullah*. By running down this, therefore, I should, barring accidents, be certain of a shot—with the camera, of course. This we proceeded to do. After going 150 yards down the *nullah*, Gul Sher crept to the ridge and looked over into the other ravine. "Now for it," I thought. Out with the camera, lens, focussing hood, slides, tripod screw, all there. Screw him up; so far, so good. Now crawl to the edge and look over. There are the ibex, but they have taken a lower line than we expected. We must go farther down. Up with the camera again. "Now catch hold, cooly, and come along." Gathering up the odds and ends of the camera, we begin again to scramble down the scree. After going down fifty yards, the cooly drops the case of slides, and I find he has left the tripod screw behind. I send him back for this, and taking the camera in my arms follow the shikari as quickly as I can. My progress, encumbered as I am, is not rapid, and Gul Sher is signalling frantically to me to make haste. Breathing anathemas on the rolling stones,

the camera, and the cooly, I struggle on, and arrive where Gul Sher is crouched, looking over into the next ravine. It seems all right. The ibex are some 250 yards off, moving slowly towards a point some 70 yards below us. I determine to point my camera at this and await their arrival. And now to fix up.

"Quick," whispers Gul Sher.

"Keep cool," I admonish myself, and begin to set the apparatus up. The tripod had been made with legs only a foot long, in order to be easier kept under cover. I now find that this modification has the unexpected result of making it most difficult to manage. The rocks, too, are sharp and angular, and not a bit of earth is there in which to fix the points. "Quick," again says the shikari, as I vainly attempt to induce the tripod to stand. The legs wobble about in all directions. After a minute's struggle, during which the tripod seems to be endowed with fiendish intelligence and determined to thwart all my efforts, I at length get it to stand. The ibex are, in the meantime, approaching a rock, round which in a few seconds they will disappear, and Gul Sher is groaning with anxiety.

"Quick, *sahib*," again he whispers. The camera is very unsteady, and as I direct it on the point the ibex will pass I remember with a pang the



Among the crags.

directions for the use of the telephoto lens—"Extreme rigidity of the whole apparatus is essential."

The focussing hood over my head, I find I have forgotten to open the shutter.

"One gone," says Gul Sher. I open the shutter and again adjust the hood.

"Two gone, three gone, the big one is last of all," he whispers. This is agonizing. I begin to focus, when a gust of wind whirls round the corner, the tripod staggers and collapses, and with it the camera.

"Four gone, quick, *sahib*—now the big one's going!" groans Gul Sher.

It was hopeless to try to set the camera up again, and nothing remained but to make use of any explctives I happened to know. The remainder of the herd, before suspicious, were now thoroughly alarmed (and no wonder, the reader will say), and began to move off quickly.

Was it that Gul Sher thought the collapse of the camera indicated the end of the sitting, and that the photograph was complete, or had he a keen appreciation of what is known as the "psychological moment"? Anyhow, at that precise instant he shoved the loaded rifle into my hands and whispered, "Take him, *sahib*." I raised it just as the big ibex was having a last look

round over his shoulder preparatory to turning the corner. Where were now my good resolutions? Crack, and down he went, head over heels. Gul Sher plunged down after him, knife in hand, his thoughts intent on meat, and I was left gathering up the *débris* of my camera and thinking of the place that is paved with good resolutions.

I returned to camp sadder and wiser. Gul Sher came in later carrying the head, and, to his surprise, I refused to look at it. With dinner, however, came reflection and a degree of consolation. I made up my mind to do better on the next occasion. My chance to-day was not a fair one, the animals were on the move and the ledge I was on unsuitable for photographic experiments. On another occasion I would take their portrait sleeping or grazing.

The next opportunity did not present itself till some days later, but what an opportunity it was! An ideal family group, consisting of a number of ibex of both sexes lying down in a grassy corrie, while above them, motionless on a needle of rock, stood a magnificent old patriarch looking down into space. The wind was steady and the stalk easy, and in my imagination I had the picture already in my possession. We got up without any difficulty to within a hundred yards of them. I fixed up the camera behind a rock and raised it

noiselessly into position. Again the difficulty with the tripod legs, but with an infinity of care and trouble I had it at length propped up with stones and fairly firm. I raised myself slowly up and pointed the camera at the herd. They still had not moved. "Now, my good shikari, drop that rifle and hand me the focussing hood." He handed it up and I began to focus.

At this moment a fine mizzle began to fall and I had to wipe the lens before finishing focussing. "It's very difficult," groaned Gul Sher. Still the herd had not moved; there was the family party enjoying their midday siesta and the patriarch still doing sentry-go. Again I drew the hood over my head and began to focus. One turn of the screw, two turns, three turns, now the image is getting distinct, rocks and trees begin to appear; now everything is clear, but where, oh where, are the ibex? "Where are they?" I whisper from under the hood. "Gone," answered a sepulchral voice. I threw the hood off and gasped "Where?" Gul Sher with a stony face pointed to a ridge half a mile away, and there, there, was the herd all standing in a clump looking back at me. After a moment's pause they disappeared. "Come, pack up," I said, "I'm off." "Yes, *sahib*," replied my shikari, and we returned to camp without another word. Though

I did not again put Gul Sher's belief in my sanity to the test by taking him with me on such expeditions, this was not by any means my last attempt at animal photography. The results were, however, invariably the same, and I have since come to the conclusion that the writer of those few Ruskinian sentences which persuaded me for a time at least to join the ranks of "nature photographers" might have had experience of sea-anemones as subjects for photography, but certainly had none of ibex. So I again took my rifles into favour, and my efforts at photography are confined to still life. The triple extension box camera and the lens with a long name repose on a back shelf, and are the property of any one who will take them away.

ABOUT BEARS.

When Rahmat, shikari, walked into Gilgit from a day on the hillside with the seat of his breeches torn out by a bear, he had not only had a good pair of homespun garments spoilt, but had run a narrow escape of losing his life. But instead of being a hero for sympathy, the tale he unfolded (I might say tail!) aroused nothing but merriment. The fact is, that though Adamzad is really a wicked villain, his *rôle* on the jungle stage is not tragedy, and never has been since his ancestors disputed lodging rights with the cave man; his absurd gait, his short sight, and the extraordinary noises he makes, all forbid it. So, for any one not principally concerned, it is as difficult to be serious over a bear adventure as over a bull episode in a green English field.

Labiatus, the sloth bear, is found in most forest-covered parts of India, where human habitations are remote, and was the member of the family whose acquaintance I made first. This

was in Central India, where big families of them are found amid jungle-clothed hills, in bamboo brakes, and in deep ravines with cool grottos, where they can get shelter from the sun. Sometimes we beat for them; sometimes with the help of an *anar*, or sort of infernal machine, we bolted them like rabbits from their caves. The first time I tried this method the *anar* was dropped into a crevice which the bear had thoughtlessly left in the roof of his parlour. The writer stood —not without qualms—on a narrow path a few yards from the cave's mouth, a hill on one side and a steep drop on the other. First there came a rumbling such as might precede the exit of a gigantic bunny, then out he came full tilt and uttering terrifying noises. Both barrels of my rifle went off, I took a step back, and tripping over a stone fell flat on my back. According to tradition among shikaris, of which care is taken not to leave the British sportsman ignorant, bears always go for the face of a prostrate foe. So for an appreciable instant I was under the painful expectation of feeling the enraged animal beginning on me in the orthodox way. When I got to my feet, however, the bear was gone, and he was soon discovered *in extremis* at the bottom of the hill, which the reader will justly remark indicated better luck than management.

A bear's charge is in fact more often than not an effort to escape, as is shown by another incident of the same sort which happened to me very shortly after. I had marked a panther into a narrow cleft which ran deep into a cliff of rock. After posting myself at its mouth, I told my shikari to throw a stone in as far as he could. Loud roars were followed by the rush of an animal, fortunately perhaps for me not the panther, but a big black bear into which the panther had seemingly transformed himself. Scarcely had I time to fire before I was knocked down by the beast, who went straight over me and away. We followed him by the biggest blood track I have ever seen, but after going some miles the blood stopped,—the commonly accepted story is that a bear himself stuffs leaves and moss into a wound, —and I never got him. This was clearly no charge but a dash for safety, his savage roars being, I imagine, mere make-believe to clear the way. She-bears with cubs do, however, sometimes mean business. One such I met on the top of a round hill, the name of which remains fixed in my memory—Gidh Toria, the vulture's "Tor." On being disturbed by two men with guns, the family made off in the high grass. A snap at the nearest, which turned out to be a cub, was followed by the most piteous howls,

hearing which, the mother promptly wheeled round and came straight at me. My orderly with a second rifle missed her, but she went down to my second barrel when not five paces away. A miss here would certainly have meant a mauling.

Another time I had shot a nearly full-grown cub from a tree towards the close of a tiger beat. A bear that was following close behind, most probably the mother, on hearing the shot, to my astonishment deliberately stopped and began looking up in the trees to discover her unseen foe. The Bhils of Central India, real jungle people, treat bears in a very offhand sort of way—in fact, pay them no courtesy at all. During a beat, I recollect seeing one of them run after a bear and with his stick catch him a sounding thwack on the part that no self-respecting animal should show to his enemy. Not that this really proves anything, for every one who knows the "Bagri" Bhil will testify to his foolhardy pluck even when in the presence of the tiger.

In the Himalaya the black bear is an individual that demands much more respect. He is, in fact, as Artemus Ward says, very "onreliable." Kipling's picture of Adamzad—

Horrible hairy and human,
The bear that looks like a man,

is a poetic inexactitude, for a bear does not attack on his hind legs; but there are a good many natives of Kashmir who, like "the old blind beggar," have paid dearly for an encounter with him.

Let me try to describe a bear *hank* in Kashmir. A few white tents dotted on a strip of turf by the banks of a stream that might be in the Peak district. The village near by is hidden in walnut and fruit trees, through the tops of which glints the graceful spire of the mosque. Beyond the stream, the hillsides are cloven by forest-filled valleys, all in autumn's burning tints, which alternate with bare grassy ridges. As we issue from our tents, the hoar-frost on the grass is melting, the sweet scent of a Himalayan wood-fire is in the air, and over the hills hangs the morning's veil of blue mist. Breakfast is eaten in the open near a roaring fire, and while the ladies retire to put on the latest thing in *shikar* helmets, pipes are lit, and the shikaris come up with their plans for the day. "Four beats before lunch and two after, *inshallah* a bear or two in most of them, while in the first beat there is a good eight-

pointer stag which may or may not come out. God knows."

We are soon on the road, accompanied by a crowd of beaters armed with thick sticks and chattering as only Kashmiris can. The latter by-and-by separate off and we find ourselves climbing in single file up a steep grassy spur. Silence is now the order. Presently we reach a wooden structure built into a tree some six feet from the ground. Nothing is left to chance here, for we are beating one of the Maharajah's preserves. Places are drawn for—longest at the top, shortest at the bottom—and the lowest gun climbs into his *machan*. The line of *machans* extends up the hill, four of them, with a couple of hundred yards between each. They are facing the jungle, the edge of which extends up the hill some twenty yards from the line of *machans*. We have drawn the top place, and as we climb into it a faint sound on the breeze shows that the signal whistle has been heard and our hundred beaters are forcing their way through the jungle towards us, each one yelling as he thinks for dear life, for the Kashmiri has a holy horror of the bear at close quarters. For a long time nothing breaks, the jungle is silent in front of us; but looking down towards the next rifle we see him slowly rise to his feet,—bang—a faint

grunt, and he subsides again. A rustling in front makes our hearts thump, but out breaks nothing more than a big red fox, that with a whisk of his brush is gone. More shots down below prove that the beat is proving no "frost." The noise of the beaters is growing nearer, one can almost catch the streams of abuse showered on the bears and their relatives. A louder shout, this means something; the stops high up on the ridge echo it, "*Hangul, hangul*" (stag). Across an open grassy space above me—close on a hundred and fifty yards—are streaming a lot of hinds, no stag so far,—but stay, here he comes. I take a point well in front of his neck, and to the shot the fine beast comes rolling down the hill to yells from the shikaris of "*Afrin, afrin.*"

I have scarcely loaded before a bear is out of the jungle in front of us and is lumbering off as fast as he knows how between our *machan* and the next. To my snap-shot he gives a grunt of anger and throws himself head over heels down the hill. Over and over he goes like a ball, to an accompaniment of grunts which get fainter and fainter till they can be heard no longer. Well, we know what that means—a wounded bear to be followed. The drive is soon over, and the beaters emerge and stand awaiting orders, as well-trained beaters should. The guns assemble

and the bag is totted up—one stag and three bears dead and one wounded. Before the next beat the latter has to be seen to.

Tracking a wounded bear begins by being thrillingly exciting, and generally ends by being dull to the point of boredom. The sportsman, usually on all-fours, crawls along the path the bear has made for himself in the dense cover of birch, hazel, alder, and willow. Now he is worming down a burn, now making his painful way through a thicket of briar. The air is close with the dank, bitter smell of moss and leaves. Extreme caution marks the beginning of the chase, the imagination depicting an angry bear at every turn, but as the search is prolonged and nothing happens, the sportsman gets very brave indeed. As to the actual *dénoûment*, the chances are that if the bear is not found very near he will not be found at all. The writer looks back on a certain occasion when he tracked a wounded bear in the aforesaid manner as one of the most dangerous in his life—not on account of the bear, for we lost him, but because my shikari had, as I discovered on reaching the open, been crawling behind me with my second rifle loaded and *off* safety. The sportsman, on the other hand, *may* come on the bear wounded, and in such circumstances it is well to have some one with him. Once, when I was out with a well-

known shot, we found ourselves in the position of having to follow an animal wounded by the latter. To make a long story short, we came on a black mass which could be none other than our friend. He was above us, when, according to all theory, one should never take a shot at bear; but he was so still that my friend, who was the owner, said he would risk it, and I was to reserve my fire. In the thick undergrowth it was impossible to distinguish head from tail. He raised his rifle—bang, bang, answered by "Wough, wough," and the bear was on us. My friend, with extraordinary facility, precipitated himself into a thorn bush and uncovered my fire, but it was only my second barrel that luckily caught him in the head and laid him at my feet, so near that I could have kicked him.

Let us now have a look at the red bear in his loftier solitudes. This beast rarely comes below 8000 feet. He sleeps through the winter, but when the spring comes he may sometimes be seen moving about the fans of snow in search of the bodies of ibex that have been killed by avalanches. At this season he has been known to kill cattle and goats; and this is the only time that lapses take place in what must otherwise be considered a blameless and estimable life, for at all others he is content with the simple life and a vegetarian diet.

One does, however, hear of mischievous individuals. My Gilgiti stalker used to tell of one that was a terror to the goat-herds sent to graze the village flocks in the Rakhiot glen—not only a robber, but a truculent one, who committed his crimes in the broad light of day and cared for neither man nor dog. Gul Sher encountered him when out with T——, a noted shot from amongst the small party of officers then at Gilgit. Behind them yawned a precipice, in front was the big beast grunting and slavering at the mouth,—the devil and the deep sea. They faced one another "while men could count a score," and still T—— did not shoot. The bear advanced.

"Shoot, for God's sake," said Gul Sher, but T—— only looked round over his shoulder. The bear came on. Then T—— slowly put his rifle up and shot him dead through the head.

"And why had not T—— shot him before?" I asked.

"That is what I wanted to know," the stalker said; "and what he told me was that he was just looking for the easiest place to go down the precipice in case the bear was not killed!"

I was sitting hearing the story at the exact spot it happened, and going to the edge looked over. The first thing to break a fall was a green lawn of pine-tree tops 2000 feet below!

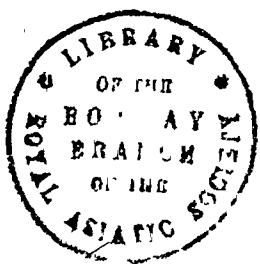
That bear was the sort of individual that spoils the reputation of an innoxious breed of animals, for the Isabelline bear is in truth not savage, and, in fact, has little to recommend him to the sportsman but his pelt. A red bear's skin in good condition, as it must be honestly stated they rarely are, is very fine.

Rather than to incidents of the hair-breadth kind, the recollection of the sportsman that has spent many hours in red-bear-land will turn to scenes of a different sort. Big brown puppy-like beasts rolling over one another in play on a grassy slope; a mamma with a pair of fluffy babies at heel, teaching them the rudiments of honey hunting—may he not, like some one I know, be haunted by the wails of the retreating nursery after a bullet has ended the mother's days.

He will remember how he found an old bear curled up in the shade of a rock, his nose clasped between his paws, and the comical sight he afterwards presented as he danced up and down on his hind legs to find out who the ——, what the ——, had rolled all the stones down the hill on the top of him!

It is possible, however, that our sportsman's pleasantest recollections of red-bear-land will not be mainly connected with bears at all. He will think of the shade of giant firs in the heat of the

day, the odours of wild flowers and thyme, the hum of bees, the distant sound of a waterfall, the eagle sailing in the sky, the snow-cock shooting across the valley. His memory's eye will range from pine-forest to precipice, green lawns to snow-filled chasms and jagged chaos, and so upward to the enchanted mountain-tops with their tattered cloud-wreaths. He will mark again the mists drive ghost-like up the valleys and bank themselves into lines of sullen breakers, or with a smile dissolve into a rainbow. He will think of the first flush of dawn on snowy ranges, glittering sierras in a crystal air, the ineffable sadness of evening stealing over purple mountains. Such are the scenes that crowd the memory of one that has lived for a space in the haunts of the snow-bear.



THE END.

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